



THE RICH KINSMAN.

THE HISTORY OF

Ruth the Moabiteess.

BY

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Introduction.

THE author presents this work in the hope that it will be found adapted to enlighten the minds of the young in some of the great subjects of Scriptural Instruction. It comprises a course of lectures delivered to the youth of his congregation on the afternoons of the Lord's day. Several such courses, upon various biographies of the Scripture, and upon other portions of Scripture, applicable as useful illustrations of Christian truth and Christian duty, he has also given to his youthful hearers. It has been the great object of all these to engage and interest the minds of the young in the study of the Holy Scriptures. Whether the publication of this one course will be considered as so likely to be useful as to warrant the preparation for similar publication of either of the other courses referred to, will be decided by the

present experiment. The author has been long impressed with the feeling that neither commentaries nor sermons have yet made that simple and practical use of the fullness of Scripture truth for which it is adapted—perhaps he might say for which it is designed. The young mind certainly can be interested in the Word of God as a book full of attraction as well as full of truth. Whoever can be made in any degree the instrument of leading to this result by bringing out to view the real attractions of the Scripture, confers so far an invaluable benefit upon others. Nothing is more desirable at the present time than a complete commentary upon the Bible, adapted to such an end—a commentary that should avoid the deep ruts of mere traditional exposition, and be designed to exhibit the fullness of truth and beauty which in a new path remain yet to be explored and displayed. Such a commentary for our Sunday-schools would be a priceless gift. To prepare it, however, will require equal acquaintance with the minds and wants of the young, and with the deep and exhaustless treasures of the Word of God. The author does not pretend to the full

possession of either of such attainments, however truly he appreciates their importance and worth. But may not others be induced to enter upon this field of untried usefulness? May not the ministry be generally led to direct their minds and study more to the great purpose of preparing Scriptural attractions as well as Scriptural instruction for the young? If the present work should be of no more general advantage, the author is perfectly sure that to his own beloved flock of youthful hearers it will be acceptable, and will by them be prized. To them, therefore, at least, he commits it without fear, and with the affectionate prayer for a Divine blessing upon its precious truths among them all.

S. H. T.

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I.

The Book of Ruth.

I HAVE always considered this one of the most interesting and instructive books of the Old Testament. It is full of precious spiritual instruction. It preaches a glorious Saviour for the lost sinner. It describes the sorrows of the wanderer from God. It shows the blessedness of the sinner's return to Christ ; the riches and bounty of the Great Redeemer ; and the fullness of love and mercy which the pardoned rebel finds in him. All these blessed truths are exhibited in the history of a family of Israelites, who strayed to the land of Moab, and of a lovely youthful convert from idolatry, who becomes united to them, and is thus led to a rich kinsman,

before unknown to her, and in whom she finds a bountiful and faithful Redeemer.

We have the story of her return from idolatry to the living God, of her first acquaintance with this rich kinsman, of her union with him in marriage, of her peaceful and happy dwelling with him, of the excellence of her own character, and of his generous liberality towards her. ¶ In all this, we have a simple and faithful preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, under the most interesting and attractive shape. He is our appointed Kinsman and Redeemer, who has bought and ransomed us with the rich price of his own blood. ¶ And, when we are brought back to him, from our wandering in sin, by the converting power of his own Spirit, we enjoy the fullness of his pardoning love, and he becomes united to us in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten. This is the view which I would give you of THE BOOK OF RUTH.

Ruth was in herself a beautiful example

of virtue and personal excellence, in every different station in which she was placed. We see her a homeless wanderer, and we see her sheltered in a happy home ; we see her in poverty, and we see her in wealth ; we see her neglected, and we see her caressed. But we see her at all times, and in all stations, the same faithful and beautiful illustration of female loveliness, purity, and benevolence. She shines before us, a remarkable instance of the power of Divine grace. It was this alone which renewed her heart, and made her really a daughter of the Lord Almighty. She became a temple of the Holy Ghost, and was thus made able to glorify God in her body, and her spirit, which were his.

She was an interesting example of the happiness which flows from a true and faithful obedience of God. True religion was to her the source of every earthly as well as of every heavenly joy. Rarely is a character so attractive and lovely in itself, seen in the sinful family of man. And under this aspect,

her history is well worthy of the study of the young. You see here the beauty of true piety in the youthful female character. Of one instance of such piety the eminent Bishop Griswold says, in a record of his journal, "She is a sensible young woman, possessed of beauty, and of all that is amiable in nature and by education ; truly pious ; her whole soul devoted to her Saviour. She reminds me of the celestial inhabitants ; she seems but 'a little lower than the angels.' What mortal state can imagination portray so nearly resembling that of those pure intelligences, as the character and life of a pious young female ?"

But let us not forget she was made thus attractive by the Holy Spirit, that Blessed Sanctifier whom the Saviour gives to all the people of God. He is the guide and teacher of all who love God. He taught the prophets and inspired holy men to write the Scriptures. And he renewed and sanctified the hearts of all who truly believed

God's word, in ancient times as well as in our day. It was he who taught Ruth to believe in a promised Saviour, and enabled her to choose and to obey his commands ; and who thus gave her the beautiful ornament of a meek and heavenly temper. This makes her character an example to the young members of the Saviour's flock in every age, because the same Spirit offers to bless and sanctify all who will receive him. How happy would it be, for every daughter of the church, to follow the same Lord, under the teaching of the same Divine Spirit !

— The history of Ruth is also a very instructive instance of the gracious Providence of God over all who truly seek him. We see her giving up all her own relations, her native land, and the idolatry of her fathers, to seek the worship, and the service of the God of Israel. But she loses nothing. She finds her happy recompense, under the shadow of his wings in whom she had come to put her trust. She not only receives the rich spirit-

ual blessings which are the gift of God to those who seek him, but she has also all other things added to her under his gracious care. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." This is a very valuable example to us, whether we think of her own conduct in obedience to God, or of the goodness and love of God towards her. The Holy Spirit gave us this book to be a witness to us, that God will never fail, nor forsake, those who put their trust in him. Every child of God may here learn, never to doubt, or to distrust, that gracious Saviour who has promised to be the everlasting friend of all who seek and love him. Great will be the blessing to you, if you shall thus be taught more truly to seek and to trust in Jesus, and to seek your shelter under the shadow of his wing.

The history of Ruth's personal connection with our blessed Lord, in his human nature, is also quite worthy of your notice. She and

Rahab were the only two Gentiles in the earthly genealogy of our Lord. He was pleased to take the nature of man in the family which descended from them. He was thus "not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." Ruth, though a native of Moab, was one of the chosen ancestors of the honored line of David. And thus Gentile blood was mingled in that exalted family, with the blood of Israel. Thus she became personally connected with the Redeemer of men. From her, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever." What a special interest does this give to her character and history for us ! All our hopes and joys are resting upon the real incarnation and manhood of this glorious and Divine Saviour ; and it is most interesting to us, to trace back the connection of his lowly humanity, to this faithful child of God, who came from the wilds of Moab, to seek the truth and the goodness of the Lord God of Israel.

But there is much more than all this in the history of Ruth. It was given to us by the Holy Spirit to preach a Saviour's love. The Holy Spirit glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ, by taking of the things which are his, and showing them unto men. He does this very plainly and beautifully in the history of Ruth. He tells us here very much of Christ; much of the kingdom of his grace, as well as of the government of his Providence. He displays the riches of his redeeming love, in a very attractive manner; and in some very important and instructive illustrations. He preaches to us the fullness of that pardoning mercy, which is exercised by the Son of God, who was manifest in the flesh, that he might be the kinsman and husband of perishing sinners; and who, when he had redeemed them by his death, betrothed them unto himself, and made them to become the Bride, the Lamb's wife. He shows us here the way in which the Saviour brings wandering sinners back to himself, receives them into his

family, feeds them with the fullness of his bounty, exalts them into an everlasting union with himself, gives them a name and a record among the generations of his children, and teaches them to praise and glorify him for ever.

All these precious lessons of Gospel truth the Holy Spirit teaches us, in the history of this youthful Moabitess. And he thus preaches the Gospel here in a very clear and beautiful way. And if the same Spirit shall graciously teach you also, you may be led to learn here the love of Christ for yourselves, your own need of such a Saviour, and the riches of his wisdom and grace in your salvation. This is the blessed and all-important purpose for which I wish you to study the history of Ruth.

But this blessed instruction is not peculiar to the Book of Ruth. It is to be found every where in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They are full of histories which are intended to lead your minds and hearts to the

same gracious and holy Saviour. They all testify of Christ, and of that eternal life which is to be found in him alone. It must ever be your aim and effort to gain a knowledge of the Saviour from them all. To obtain this knowledge of Jesus, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit is worth all the study it may cost you, and all the time it may require. Seek for this as an invaluable blessing. Throughout your whole Bible try to find the Saviour speaking to you. He is every where in it. The same Spirit has written it all. And in every part of it he waits to teach you the same Gospel, and to explain to you the same salvation. The more earnestly you study the sacred Word, praying to him to enlighten and teach you, the more clearly will you see this one subject constantly before you.

It is this "teaching and preaching Jesus Christ," which makes the Bible so precious to the people of God, in every generation, and in every land. They read of their Beloved

Lord in every part of it, and “to them that believe, he is precious.” If you shall really find a Saviour there, it will be equally attractive and precious to you. Then seek him there. Seek the guidance of his Spirit, that you may find him. Pray for Divine teaching, “the unction of the Holy One.” When you find him, embrace him with delight, as your portion for ever. Thus the patriarchs and prophets believed in him. Thus Ruth believed in him. Thus all the ancient saints believed in him. They rejoiced in looking forward to his day of grace and glory. Be ye followers of them, who, through faith and patience, obtained the promises. Rejoice to be united with them in the same precious promises, the same steadfast faith, the same blessed hope.

The Scriptures of the Old Testament are a rich mine. The blessed Saviour is the precious gold which is hidden within it. How earnestly ought we to search for this pure gold, more precious than the gold of

Ophir. Sometimes it lies very near the surface. As they speak of earthly mines, it "crops out" in beautiful exhibitions of its worth, which every traveler may see. Sometimes it lies far deeper, and requires much skill in discovering it, and much persevering meditation and study to obtain and separate it. But the gold is always really in the mine. And it will always prove really worth every effort which you may make to get it. If you gain a real living interest in the glorious Saviour, and enjoy the peace and hope which he imparts, you will feel rewarded a thousand-fold, for all the toil his service costs. But never be satisfied with your study of the Bible, until you really understand and enjoy this word of life.

Many years ago I visited a friend living in the valley of Wyoming, on the Susquehanna river. His beautiful farm extended back from the river into the hills which bound the valley. In examining his ground among the hills, far back from the river, he discovered

the cropping out of coal upon the hill-side. He knew immediately that there was a mine beneath. But instead of digging just where he saw the coal, his scientific skill led him to calculate "the dip" of the mine ; that is, its inclination or slope. Then he went down to the edge of the river, and began to dig a canal for boats, from the river back to the hills. Ignorant men wondered at such strange labor. They almost thought him insane. Why should a man dig a canal from the river to stop at the foot of an impassable mountain ? But he persevered in his work without explaining his design. And, when he had finished his plan, and they saw his work completed, the worth of his science and skill appeared, and they were glad to acknowledge it. His canal stopped at the face of a beautiful vein of coal which dipped toward the river. He could thus take out his coal with boats in the very bosom of his mine, while all the water from the mine drained into the canal, and left his coal dry. The same skill-

ful plan found the coal, drained the mine, and opened his coal to an easy transportation for sale.

The Old Testament is a rich mine of Gospel truth. The Gospel lies hidden there in all its fullness and worth. The Saviour is to be found under all the types and histories which are there contained. It is your privilege to search these Scriptures for that knowledge of your Saviour which is eternal life. These types and histories are like pictures of our blessed Lord, in the different parts of the work of his redemption for man, drawn by the Holy Spirit for man's instruction. The Old Testament is full of them, and thus full of the knowledge of Christ. O that I could persuade my young friends to search for this knowledge ; to feel and to say, "How I love Thy word ! it is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver." Never be contented with your study of any part of the Holy Scriptures, until you find yourself growing under its instruction, in the knowl-

edge and love of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Holy Scriptures are a deep, pure sea. The Saviour is the pearl of great price which lies at the bottom of the deep. Perhaps many may search there and not find it. In some particular effort you may for a time search in vain. But if you persevere in your search, you will surely find at last the pearl you seek. And then it will repay you for all your toil. You will cheerfully sell all that you have to buy it. All that you can desire is not to be compared to it.

“The world its fancied pearl may crave,
’Tis not the pearl for me,
’Twill dim its lustre in the grave,
’Twill perish in the sea.
But there’s a pearl of price untold,
That never can be bought with gold,
The sinking soul ’twill save :
O, that’s the pearl for me.”

This is the pearl I would have you find in the history of Ruth. What can it teach me of Christ? What will it show me of the

way of his salvation, or of the blessings and privileges which he bestows upon his people? This is the great object of our study here. I might justly say, this is the only really great and important object of life itself. We never really know how to live until we can say, "for me to live is Christ." Wise and happy will you be to part with every thing beside, if you may win him as your portion, your everlasting inheritance.

This pearl here lies before you in the clearest sea. This pure gold is here scattered before you in every part of the field. You may gather durable riches here with great delight, with little labor, and without weariness in the effort. If the Holy Spirit be pleased to teach you, you will see the marks of the Lord Jesus often before you, as you think on that which he has been pleased to write for you here. O that he may write it all on the living tables of your hearts, and give you of the hidden treasures of his grace, which are here laid up! Then will your study of this inter-

esting book be happy and useful. The Saviour will come to dwell with you. You will find your refuge and shelter with him. It will help to prepare you to dwell with him in the kingdom of his glory. It will teach you to join in that heavenly song which all the justified children of his grace sing for ever unto him. Happy, happy will you be, to make your choice like Ruth's, and like her to find an everlasting home in your Great Kinsman's heavenly habitation.

“Let Pleasure chant her syren song!
’Tis not the song for me;
To weeping it will turn ere long,
For this is Heaven’s decree.
But there’s a song the ransom’d sing,
To Jesus, their exalted King,
With joyful heart and tongue:
O that’s the song for me.”

Ah, my dear young friends, try to learn that heavenly song with all the redeemed of God. Choose your part and portion in Christ, that his Spirit may teach you his truth, to love his service, to follow his commands, and

to walk in his steps. This will be a constant education for that glorified state, and an increasing acquaintance with its everlasting joys, where, with Ruth the Moabitess, and all the chosen family of God, you shall have your inheritance for ever.

There is no more important instrument for the attainment of this end, than your habitual and earnest study of the Word of God. Try to write its truths upon your memory, and imprint its principles upon your hearts. Let no day of life pass without the sincere study of some portion of this Divine revelation from God to man. Neglect no part of it. Every word of God is good. The word of the Lord is perfect. Let it convert your souls. If any portion seems difficult or barren, it will only require the more earnest and careful thought. As your years go by, its habitual study will open new pleasures, and give new delights. Still brighter light will shine upon its pages. Still clearer and deeper truth will be laid open before your view.

O learn to love your Bible more. It will be your inseparable treasure. You may carry it wherever you go. You may enjoy it wherever you are. You may feed upon it in health, and it will be your consolation in sickness. Its blessed instructions will enlighten your minds, and strengthen your hearts for every study and duty in life. Its precious words of life will still dwell in your memory, and cheer your hopes, in the last hours of your earthly day. When every thing outward has faded away, these blessed promises and truths will shine around you, like stars in midnight darkness, and make you feel never less alone than when you seem to have been cut off from all whom you have known and loved on earth.

Come, then, my dear young friends, let us search this heavenly mine, in the beautiful vein which the story of Ruth opens to our view, and there try to find and love the gracious Saviour whom Ruth so really found and so truly loved. Let us go into the clear

depths of this heavenly sea, and try to obtain the blessed pearl of price for which Ruth counted every thing else but loss. Then will you say, from the abiding enjoyment of your own hearts, "all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to this. Dearer to us than thousands of gold and silver, yea, than life itself, is that Divine Redeemer whom we have chosen for ourselves, as all our righteousness and our heritage for ever."

II.

The Wanderers.

Now it came to pass in the days when the Judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephraimites of Bethlehem Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other was Ruth; and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died, also, both of them; and the woman was left of her husband and her two sons."—RUTH, i. 1-5.

THUS the history of Ruth begins with a story of wanderers from God. It is a sad, but not a strange commencement. A family of Israelites are dwelling together in their native land, and the first knowledge we have of their particular history, is the knowledge of their folly. They went from the land

of Israel, to sojourn in the country of Moab.

[Why did they wander, and thus leave the home of their fathers? The answer given is, "there was a famine in the land." God had sent upon them a temporary trouble, and they fled from it.] But when God chastens us in his wisdom, our duty is to yield with contentment and submission. We should hear the rod, and Him who hath appointed it. When we patiently yield to his merciful chastisements, they become our most precious blessings. For the present they are not joyous, but grievous. But they produce for us the peaceable fruits of righteousness in the end, if we are properly exercised thereby. But trouble produced no peaceable fruits to the family with whose story this book begins. Instead of contentment, submission, and more affectionate obedience, we see a spirit of discontent and repining, which is allowed to drive them from their home into a strange land.

“There was a famine in the land,” and they fled from it. Temporary suffering made their home for a little while uncomfortable, and they could not patiently endure the will of God. It was their own land. It was their father’s land. It was the Lord’s land. Their family and friends were there. But there was a season of famine there, and therefore they would fly to some other land. But why should they fly? The next season might be better, and more than repay them for the losses of the present. The famine might follow them to the land whither they went, and make their sufferings greater there than at home. When Socrates was urged by his friends to escape from the prison where he was condemned to die, he answered them, “Tell me of a land where men do not die, and I will escape to that.” How much better might this family have found a quiet submission to the will of God! But no—a dead fly spoils the ointment of the apothecary. A single trouble makes men forget a thousand

blessings. A solitary want will blot out the grateful memory of innumerable comforts. "There is a famine in the land," and they have determined to remove.

What an illustration this is, of sinful, foolish man ! Adam had all the garden of Eden. He might freely eat of every tree of the garden. There was enough, and more than enough to make him entirely satisfied and happy. But there was one prohibition, a single restraint, one tree of which he must not eat. And for this how easily he was tempted to feel that there was a famine in the land ! An injustice was done to him, he thought, and he must not yield to such an arbitrary restraint. Discontented, rebellious, repining thoughts were stirred up in his mind toward God. And he was persuaded to eat, though God had said "thou shalt not eat." One single restraint made him a voluntary wanderer from God.

How easily have all who have descended from him rebelled and wandered since ! In-

stead of submitting, enduring, loving, hoping still, when God is pleased to restrain and correct us, we constantly try to run from his control ; we refuse to have him to reign over us. Like wandering birds driven from their nest. Like wandering stars rushing into darkness. Like waves of the sea, driven of the wind, and tossed. Thus we wander in sin, we know not where, we know not to what. Forsaking the fountain of living waters, we hew out to ourselves broken cisterns, that can hold no water. But can we ever find happiness in running away from God ? Is there any happiness but in a cheerful, filial submission to God ?

See where this wandering from God begins—in a spirit of rebellion and discontent. O be ye watchful, there. Be ready, my dear young friends, to hear and to do the will of God. In the midst of your trials remember his mercies. When there seems to be a famine in your land call to mind the loving-kindness of the Lord. The more he chastens you,

cling to him the more closely. Try to live still more completely at his gracious feet, and in an affectionate dependence on his promised presence and aid. Let him be your hiding place and shield ; and be still, and know that he is God.

But who were these wanderers whose story we have before us ? They were a family of Israelites, of professed believers in the Word of God. There is no aspect of sin more painful than that in which it appears connected with the privileges of men. Never does sin seem to be more dreadful than when man's ingratitude is contrasted with God's mercies. How often the gracious Lord appeals to men on this ground ! "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it ? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes ?" "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen

doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not !” It is sad enough to see any of the children of men buried in sin. But to see children who have been brought up in the sanctuary, children of pious parentage, children for whom faith, and piety, and prayer have watched, children whose early youth has been dedicated to God, and nurtured in his church ; to see these go astray, and throw off all the restraints which have been so mercifully spread around them ; to see *them* rush into sin, away from God, away from hope, away from eternal life—this is the saddest sight which earth presents to a Christian’s mind. Well may a pious father cry out with David, “O Absalom, my son, my son !” Well may a godly mother weep like Rachel over children who are dead in sin ; or exclaim, like the mother of Lemuel, “What, my son ! and what, the son of my vows !” over beloved children like these, wandering off from God, and holiness, to sin, and ruin, and despair !

How exalted in blessings was the man who first wandered from God ! Every comfort for his body and his soul was his. God walked with him in the garden, and delighted in the work of his hands. And yet man rebelled and became an outcast. And is not every wanderer from God richly endowed with divine mercies ? You are never straitened in God. You have all things and abound in him. He is rich in his mercy to you all. Why should you wander ? How mournful is that divine exclamation, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me !" "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master. If then I be a father, where is mine honor ? And if I be a master, where is my fear ?"

This wandering in our story was wholly unnecessary. These Israelites were not poor and perishing. They "went out full." Their wandering was therefore wilful, and this made it the more rebellious and guilty. But is not all wandering from God unnecessary ? Why

need we ever go astray from him ? It will be always a solemn charge against us, "they went out full." It is the wandering which makes us empty. The poor prodigal went out full. "Father," said he, "give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." "And the father divided unto them his living." Is it not so with us all ? Are we not dwelling in the midst of Divine mercies from the day we are born ? If we go away from God, our own heedlessness or choice is the fountain of our guilt and sorrow. Why need we wander ?

Some years since, a young man entered alone into the catacombs of Rome. He tied a thread at the entrance, and kept the ball in his hand ; and though he had no guide in the dark and intricate passages, he took with him a torch, and wandered on, feeling no fear. Far under ground, he wandered about these dark ways, and examined with delight the monuments and inscriptions which abounded on every side. He stopped to copy many

of these inscriptions in his book. But in copying one he accidentally put out his torch, and lost his thread. Ah, there he was, in midnight darkness, and entirely alone. He shouted aloud, but there was none to hear. He groped about on the ground to find his thread, but in vain. He wandered around the mazes of these winding passages, to find his way back to the entrance, but it was impossible. In fear, distress, and weariness, at last he fell down and fainted away. In his unconscious agony he clenched the earth with his hand, and, when he came to himself, he found his thread within it. He sprang up with delight. He followed back his guiding thread. He stopped to look at nothing by the way. Soon he saw the dim light, and came to the entrance of the catacomb, and to the outward air again. Wearied, and grateful for his life restored, he knelt upon the ground, and gave thanks to his merciful, preserving God.

He lost his thread—he lost his light—and

the journey, which was safe and happy before,
is wretched and despairing now.

“ Brave and alone he cherishes his light,
And trusts his clew will guide him back aright.
Onward he goes, nor takes a note of time,
Impelled, enchanted in this dismal clime.
Thrilling with awe, but yet untouched by fear,
He passes on, from dreary unto drear ;
The crypts diverge, the labyrinths are crossed,
He will return,—alas ! his clew is lost.

He gropes, but gropes in vain,
Recedes, advances, and turns back again.
A shivering fear, a downright terror next,
Seizes his soul, and he is sore perplexed !
He halts, he nerves, he thinks he rushes on,
But only finds that issue there is none.
But hark ! a step ! alas, no step is there !
But see ! a glimmering light ! O foul despair !
No ray pervades this darkness grim and rare.
He staggers, reels, and falls, and falling prone,
Grapples the ground where he must die alone.
But in that fall touches his outstretched hand
That precious clew the labyrinth can command,
Long lost, but now regained !
And up he rises, quick, but cautious grown,
He threads the mazes by that string alone :
Comes into light, and feels the fanning breeze,
Sees the bright stars, and drops upon his knees.
His first free breath is uttered in a prayer,
Such as none say who have not known despair ;
And never had the earth such rich perfume,
As when from him it chased the odor of the tomb.”

Your guiding thread and light are the

Word and Spirit of God. The one is put into your hands to teach you the love of Christ, and the way to life eternal. By it, the Blessed Spirit would keep you from wandering, and lead you to serve and honor your glorious Lord. If you lose it amidst the dark passages of a sinful world, it is possible that you may recover it again. If you wander from its directions it is possible you may be brought back again. But why will you try the hazardous experiment? Why need you lose your thread at all? Why should you not bind it to the cradle of your childhood, and then hold it and keep it all the way through life? Why may you not hide this blessed Word in your hearts, from your earliest youth, and never allow it to be plucked from you? Why need you stray in sinful rebellion when God has so richly furnished you with the blessings of his grace, and permitted you to come behind in no gift? You can never excuse your sinful wanderings, as if they were not to be avoided. O no! You

grieve the Holy Spirit ; you do always resist the Holy Ghost. You despise his love. You quench his blessed influences upon your hearts, in every wandering from God. He cries after you in his Holy Word, "Why will ye die?" He warns you against all your sinful carelessness and disobedience. "What will ye do in the end thereof, for the end of these things is death?"

From whence did these Israelites wander ? It was from the Lord's own land, Immanuel's land. It was from the whole company of his people. It was from the midst of the privileges of Divine revelation. It was from Bethlehem, "the house of bread." Bethlehem was a fertile and productive spot. In its fields Boaz gathered his abundant harvests. In its valleys David tended his father's flock. Within its gates a valued spring sent forth its refreshing stream. But Bethlehem had a higher glory. It was the appointed birthplace of the Saviour of Israel. Out of Bethlehem He was to come who was to be the

Ruler of the people of God for ever, whose goings forth were from everlasting. In Bethlehem He was born, who is the real "bread of God" which giveth life to the world. How many blessed thoughts and privileges center around our remembrance of Bethlehem! And it was from Bethlehem that this discontented family wandered, not knowing whither they went. It was a hasty, foolish wandering from a happy home.

We will not call every journey a wandering. It depends upon whence we came, and whither we go, and under whose direction we move. Abraham journeyed from Chaldea to Canaan. But he was no wanderer. God guided and preserved him, and every step was taken in obedience to Divine command. Jacob went down from Canaan to Egypt. But this was no wandering. God directed him, and sent his beloved Joseph before him, to make provision for him. Israel came through the wilderness to Canaan again. But even here they were no wanderers. The

Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud and fire, to guide and protect them. These were not wanderings. But Jonah wandered. When God sent him to Nineveh, he fled to Tarshish. And God arrested him in the deep, and brought him back. Manasseh wandered. And he was taken in the thorns, and bound with fetters, till, in the day of his affliction, he sought the Lord, and was forgiven. Demas wandered. From a love of this present world, he forsook his master, and returned no more. Judas wandered. And how fearful was his end, when he went to his own place !

This is the wandering of which we have to speak. It is a wandering from God, from his Spirit, from his Word, from his Church. It is a wandering from that blessed Gospel which preaches a Saviour for sinners, which opens and provides a house of bread, and a perfect shelter in him for the needy and the perishing. Thus do multitudes wander, living in sin, without God, and without hope.

But why need they wander? Are they not all bought with a price? Are they not all redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, the Lamb without spot? Can any of them say, "The door of mercy was not opened to me?" Dare they say, there is no propitiation for their sins? no way for them to love or serve God? None can say so with truth. Bethlehem is still open for you all. The Saviour still entreats you. His salvation is still freely offered to you. This is true of you all. Whosoever goes astray from God, voluntarily leaves the salvation which has been provided for him, and makes it his condemnation that he has loved darkness rather than light, because his ways are evil. Of every unconverted sinner it must be said, that he is a voluntary wanderer from God.

But there are many wanderers from God in a very peculiar sense. They go from the very midst of his family, from Bethlehem itself, where Jesus is. They were born in his church. They were early dedicated to him in

his holy sacrament. They were taught His Word, and named and registered among the number of his covenant people. They might have lived always at his feet, and in his favor. But they left Bethlehem in rebellious discontent. They wandered away from the voice of prayer, and of Divine instruction, to the haunts of vice, and the abodes of shame. The prodigal "gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance in riotous living." It is a fearful thing to see Satan thus spoiling and plundering the nursery of the Lord. If we should say to many a wanderer in the basest sin, "From whence comest thou?" how often would he have to reply, "I came from the house of God ; I came from the bosom of loving, praying parents ; I came from a family of faithful prayer ; I had the mark of the Lord on my infant forehead ; I was early taught his blessed word. But sinners enticed me, and I consented. My soul has trodden down the Lord's strength. I have despised

and grieved his holy Spirit. I have plunged from the very rock of grace into the deep abyss of all iniquity." Ah, what a retrospect is this ! What bitter memories do all our wanderings from the house of God, and from the living bread of the Gospel, bring at last !

Whither did these Israelites wander ? To "the country of Moab ;" to a land of idolatry ; a land of open licentiousness and crime. It was here that Balak tried to destroy Israel. It was here that Balaam taught him to corrupt them with sensuality and open pollution. And yet hither, to this wretched, defiled land, so hostile to God and to his people, this wandering family from Bethlehem came. What a contrast of places was this ! What a change of condition to them ! What though bread were abundant there ! "Fullness of bread like that in Sodom !" Man does not live by bread alone. And who that truly loved God, would not rather live with a famine in Bethlehem, than with sinful abundance in Moab ?

Mere territorial Moab still lies on the eastern side of Jordan and the Dead Sea. But there is an equivalent spiritual Moab every where. The guilty world in which we dwell furnishes a Moab, in all its provisions of gratifications for the flesh, and all its temptations to vicious indulgence, in every land. We need never go far to sojourn in Moab. Its crimes and its enjoyments, its hostility to the Saviour and to his people, are always in our view. Its false prophets, who cannot prevail against the children of grace with curses, are always on the alert, to entice them to eat of their sacrifices, and to bow down to their gods. Multitudes are caught in the fatal snares which are thus spread for the feet of the unwary. And, when the judgments of God come upon this guilty world, these poor victims of its delusions will perish with the Moab to which they have joined themselves.

But how minutely true is the illustration which these wanderers from Bethlehem furnish ! They went to Moab, but only “to

sojourn there." Just as Lot went to sojourn in Sodom. Just as every wanderer from God goes into the world. It is but for recreation. It is only a harmless indulgence. It is but for a season of enjoyment. They mean some time to return, and never to go back to Moab again. To die in Moab, without God, and without hope ! Nothing is further from their thoughts than this. They will only dip in the lake, like the swallow, and they shall feel refreshed for a longer flight. Ah, how little they know of the dangers they encounter ! They go like an ox to the slaughter, or like a bird to the snare of the fowler, and know not that it is for their life. They know not—they will not know—that the dead are there, and their guests are in the depths of hell. How many such have we known, whose infancy was openly offered to God ; over whose youth hope bent down to gaze with intense delights, and with the brightest anticipations ; while decency has blushed and wept over the degradation of their maturity ; and

dark despair has built her tabernacle over their sepulchre. It is a fearful path. Whoso goeth therein shall not know life.

O, ye children of Bethlehem, I entreat you, wander not to Moab. Seek no bread which is offered to you there. The sons and daughters of Moab, the kings and prophets of Moab, avoid them all. Balak's house, full of silver and gold, will not alleviate the anguish of Balaam's cry, "I shall see him, but not nigh; O let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." There is no death of the righteous in Moab. But there is death, a sad, hopeless death—in the wretchedness of which, thou wilt mourn at the last, and say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; I was almost in all evil, in the midst of the congregation and assembly."

"O pleasures past, what are ye now,
But thorns about my bleeding brow?
Spectres that hover round my brain
And mock and aggravate my pain.

“For Pleasure I have given my soul!
Now Justice bids her thunders roll;
And Vengeance smiles, while, deep in woe,
She lays the rebellious ingrate low.”

And what were the results of their wandering? What could they be, but wasting sorrow and death? How significant of their history do the names of these people seem! The man's name was Elimelech, *God my King*. The name of his wife, Naomi, *Pleasant*. Their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, *Wasting* and *Consumption*. The history of their lives seems to be written in their very names. Their wandering from the kingdom of God, and from the land where His Word and worship made even trials to be pleasant, brought nothing to them but sorrow, wasting, and death. Their temporary sojourn in Moab proved, for three of them, their last journey. “They came into the country of Moab, and they continued there.” This was their last earthly home. They died in banishment from the land of their fathers and their God. Soon the father finished his

course, and died in Moab. But the father's death did not arouse them from their wandering, or send them back to seek the Lord. No. They were now sunk in the stupidity of their sin. The infatuation of the world had seized the widowed mother. The sons wed themselves to idolaters, and determine to make their abode in Moab. Ten years of guilty forgetfulness of God go by, and his awakening judgments interpose again. The two young men die also in the midst of their schemes of indulgence and sin. And three widows are there remaining, the solemn and affecting monuments that God will not be forgotten. Poverty comes in upon them like an armed man. Solitude, wretchedness, separation from God, miserable reflections on the past, equally wretched prospects of the future, darken the windows of their widowed habitation. Ah, how sad are the results of a life of guilt ! How mournful are the consequences of a wandering from God !

Thus wretched and hopeless is always the

sinner's degraded condition, when sin is about completing its perfect work ! The prodigal begins to be in want. He hires himself to feed swine in the field. He covets even the foul garbage which the swine do eat. He could be happy if he might bring his tastes perfectly to his condition. But this can never be, and he is more wretched and needy than they. Now, every thing has gone. Enjoyment has fled. Hope has expired. Society has departed. Companions stand aloof. Wealth has vanished. Nothing remains but degradation and despair. Wasting and consumption are in all his borders. The sinner is left alone. The world, which has betrayed him, forsakes him. The enemy who has destroyed him, mocks at him. The only Comforter who can relieve his soul stands far from him. His judgment lingereth not. His damnation slumbereth not. No longer is he deceived. The misery of his condition is now before his view. His ruin is undeniable. The wages of his sin is death. Eternal

death, the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched, is spread out before him.

To call this a result of wretchedness, of sorrow, is feeble and trifling. It is the damnation of the soul. It is a loss, for which earth has no measure ; for which the human mind has no conception ; which nothing can illustrate or explain, but the hopeless experience of eternity itself. And this is the result of wandering from God ! O, let sinful youth stop, and contemplate the end to which they press. Look whither you are going. See the sorrow you are laying up for yourselves, in a wasting of life without recovery ; in a departure without hope ; in an eternity which is darkness and the shadow of death. And while there is time and opportunity to return ; and hope of pardon, if you will return ; listen to the Lord Jesus, as he cries unto you from Bethlehem, from Calvary, from Zion : " Look unto me and be ye saved ; for I am God, and there is none else."

III.

The Awakening.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, that she might return from the country of Moab ; for she had heard in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited his people, in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on their way to return unto the land of Judah."—RUTH, I 6, 7.

To trace the course of the wanderer away from God is sad and painful. The result of misery and regret is always the same ; whether he ever return to God or not, his sorrow over the remembrance of his wandering will be equally sure. He may never come back. He may never receive the gift of true repentance. He may never find the forgiveness of his sins. He may persevere in his rebellious folly to the end of life. But he can not avoid the long day of grief

which is sure to come. An awakening will at last arrive, when he will lift up his eyes in distress, and mourn over the madness which has suffered him to be so deceived and ruined by the enemies of his soul.

We must never hesitate, therefore, in proclaiming to all the wanderers from God, "You will find no rest in Moab."

"The world can never give
The bliss for which you sigh;
It is not all of life to live,
Nor all of death to die."

You will mourn at the last, though it may be with a sorrow of the world which worketh death. You will find no profit to yourself, though you may have gained the whole world, when God taketh away your soul.

But I am not now to trace this course of sin to its dreadful result. There is for some a day of awakening in the present life. And, painful as this day may be, it is still a happy day. It is the beginning of a new life, a happy life, a life of glory. It is the dawning

of a light which is prepared 'as the morning. It is the blessed visitation of the grace and goodness of God to the lost and guilty. However faint and dim it may be in its beginning, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day. This is the awakening which we are now to trace. It is the commencement of the wanderer's return, over which there is joy in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God. Blessed is the soul to whom this heavenly mercy comes. Blessed will you be, if it shall come to you.

We must never forget that this awakening of the soul is the work of God. The whole world lieth in the wicked one. Idolatry and enmity to God reign throughout the land of Moab. There Naomi dwells. There the sinner is found. There, if God permitted, Naomi would die. There, if God did not arrest and arouse him, the sinner would perish. He sees the wanderer dead in his sins ; without God, and without hope ; nay, worse than this, satisfied, contented, often rejoicing in his state

of ruin. To leave him in prosperity in this condition, is to leave him to hopeless destruction. God speaks unto him in his prosperity, and he says, I will not hear. This is his manner from his youth. Then comes the question, "What shall I do to my vineyard? I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down. I will lay it waste, and it shall not be pruned nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns." Then God sends awakening providences. Afflictions and losses are multiplied. The nest is broken up. The soul is made sorrowful. Thus it was with Naomi. Her husband died. Her two sons are taken away. "And the woman is left of her two sons, and her husband." Now Moab begins to show its real character, its perfect worthlessness to comfort the suffering soul. The folly of their wandering begins to appear. This is God's method of commencement. Thus he giveth his beloved rest.

How many of his children have been saved by the bitter remedy of affliction, and have thus been taught to bless the chastenings of the Lord ! Adversity saves multitudes whom prosperity would have destroyed. But prosperity will rarely bless those who have passed through sorrow unawakened. Naomi, solitary and bereaved, feels her soul far off from peace. She forgets prosperity. Remembering her affliction and her misery, the wormwood and the gall, her soul is humbled within her. This she recalls to mind, and now she has hope. It is of the Lord's mercies she is not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

But why should you ever provoke the Lord to visit you with sorrow ? Why should you make affliction necessary to your soul's salvation ? Let the goodness of the Lord lead you to repentance. Let his love awaken your gratitude. Let his long-suffering recall your affections to his service. Listen to the voice of his gracious invitations, and seek him

while he may be found, with filial, grateful love. Choose him freely as your Father, and your eternal portion ; not because he drives you to himself, but because you desire and love him. How much happier, and how much more likely to be permanent, is that piety which comes in youth, and health, and prosperity, and which lays an affectionate filial spirit at the Saviour's feet, serving him because he is altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand !

“As by the light of opening day
The stars are all concealed ;
So earthly glories fade away
When Jesus is revealed.”

But whether affliction or joy be made the instrument to awaken the soul, it is equally a Divine instrument. The work is altogether the Lord's work. The Holy Spirit alone can give you a knowledge of your sin, and create a godly sorrow in your hearts. There is nothing in the instrument, whatever it may be, which can change the heart of man.

When the world becomes distasteful, and the soul is wearied with sin ; when you feel the guilt of your wandering, and desire to return to God ; when you are conscious of the first emotion of sorrow for your transgression, and begin to look back upon your life with shame and regret—this is the work of the Holy Spirit. Welcome it, encourage it, do not resist it, but cultivate it as a priceless gift. Now God means to bless you indeed. Listen to his voice with gladness.

Sad were Naomi's condition and feelings. Her heart was solitary and broken. And yet this was the most promising hour of her life. Far, far better was this beginning of a return with conscious emptiness to God, than her former going out full. Now she may hope. It is the beginning of a blessed day. When the prodigal comes to himself, the Saviour rejoices, and angels triumph. Blessed, glorious evidence, that God has not finally forsaken him like reprobate silver, and thrown him aside, cast out of the sight of his eyes.

Happy will be the day when we shall see you all thus aroused from your slumbers, and made to inquire for that blessed Lord, whom you have so long neglected, and so much offended. Awake, awake, my young friends, from this dreaming life in Moab, and return unto the Lord, and he will receive you. He will abundantly pardon you, and give you the sure mercies of his Son, your all-sufficient, only Saviour.

In this day of awakening, Naomi found that she had gained nothing by her wandering from God. There had been a famine in Judah. But ah, she had found a far worse famine in Moab. There, every comfort had failed, and every hope had departed. In no single point was her condition improved by her flight from Israel. But was this peculiar to her? Can you ever gain in such a course? We often hear of the toils and trials of religion; and of the joys and pleasures of the world. But is not all this a delusion? Has the worldly mind a single real pleasure which

is denied to the Christian? Are the enjoyments of the present life ever enhanced by rebellion against God? Are you ever the happier for transgression, or made the more contented by forgetting your Creator?

Far enough from all this is your actual experience. Your awakened mind looks back upon life, to say, with distress, I have sinned, and what hath it profited me? There is not a single real pleasure, or joy, or gain in life, of which any man can truly say, "This, at least, is the reward of my sin." What had the prodigal gained when he came to himself? His property wasted, his life miserable, his condition degraded! Alas, sin had cost him much, but it had brought him nothing. You will all see the same unprofitable character in life past. You will look back upon the whole of life, and feel that you have spent your strength in vain. You have nothing to show as the recompense of all your toil and labor.

Even if you never truly repent, your ret-

rospect of life will be just as unsatisfying, and destitute of comfort to your soul. You may dance and frolic. You may indulge your sinful appetites. You may pass your days and nights in frivolity and mirth. You may acquire wealth, and withhold yourself from no joy within the reach of a sinful man. You may take God's Sabbath to yourself, and find your pleasure on his holy day. But when you come to look back upon all this from the hour of death, or from the day of judgment, the memory of your folly will eat into your soul, as if it were fire. You will despise all that you have gained. You will despise yourself, for pursuing vanities so madly. And nothing will remain to you as the result, but the most overwhelming despair.

I knew a young lady in the very morning of her life, whose earthly condition gave her every means of indulgence, and who spent her days in the society of the gay and worldly. She rejected the Gospel from her heart, though she heard it weekly. The

bread of Bethlehem she gave up for the vines of Moab. The voice of a Saviour she exchanged for the flattery of the world. There was, to her, a famine in the Church of the joys which she desired, and she tried to find them in the gay and glittering throng of the guilty. Thus she passed her life in the giddy whirl of pleasure, and tried to think that she was happy. But God suddenly blasted all her hopes, and blighted all her joys. She was laid upon a bed of sickness for immediate and unexpected death. A few hours only passed before she died. But they were sad and awful hours. She was awakened to see her guilt, and to mourn over her worldly, sinful life. Her cry was, "I am black with sin." This she repeated without comfort. Vain were the provisions of wealth. Vain were the consolations of worldly friends. Vain was the memory of joys that were passed. The Spirit had aroused her conscience, and she abhorred them all. And though she died with no happy avowal of

hope, her agonizing soul cried out, over and over again, "I am black with sin—I am all black with sin." Ah, how vain and empty Moab looks, when this day of awakening comes! It has nothing which can offer one hour's peace to an anxious, serious mind. And all the days and years which you may have spent there, are, at the very best view of them, but so much time completely wasted and thrown away.

But Naomi found more than this. Her wandering from God had brought great loss and sorrow with it. She was left a widow and childless. Her husband and her sons were taken from her; and, like Rachel, she was weeping, with no comforter. All the evils which she might have suffered in Israel seemed of little account, in comparison with her present griefs. We can bear any outward trial with patience, and even with pleasure, if we have affectionate sympathy under it, from our family and friends, and can see the good hand of the Lord in laying it

upon us. Naomi was ready to say, "I would rather have been a beggar in Canaan, with my husband and my sons about me, than be the possessor of every thing in Moab without them. But they were gone, and every thing she valued seemed to have gone with them. Well did she say, "Call me not Naomi, pleasant; call me Mara, bitter, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Yes, the wages of all our wanderings from God are bitter enough. Earthly pleasure may give its color in the cup, and appear to the deluded eye to move itself aright. But at the last, it will bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder. The wages of sin is death.

These present actual losses are in themselves quite sufficient to arrest your conscience, and make you stop and think of your folly in a course of wandering from God. In the day of your real awakening from your sin, you will find it so. How much you have lost! You have thrown away the favor of God. You have sacrificed your peace of conscience.

You have lost your early readiness to receive religious impressions. You have driven away the Saviour who would have loved and blessed you. You have grieved and wearied the Holy Spirit, who admonished and taught you. You have thrown from you the precious hope and comfort which the Gospel offered you. And what have you left? NOTHING. Nothing but degradation and guilt. Not a day of life passed can satisfy you. It all seems guilty and wretched in an extreme degree. You look back upon it with shame and sorrow. It is a vain attempt to console you with the idea that your views of sin are excessive ; that your estimate of your guilt is overwrought. No. You see the hidden evils of your heart, evils which others can not see. The outward restraints which they have seen, and which they approve, do not make these evils less. Your heart within is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. And it is this

which fills you with grief, and humbles you with conscious unworthiness.

No one can estimate these losses in Moab, until he sets out to come back to God. Then the world assumes its real aspect. Unpardoned sin reveals its grievous load. All your gains are nothing. Your stricken soul mourns in bitterness. Your broken heart cries out with anguish. Your conscience tells you of a thousand forgotten crimes. You despise the follies which have deluded you. You abhor the guilt which has marked you before God. There is no peace for your soul. Wretched, helpless, almost in despair, you cry out, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Every thing seems lost. And unless you can be brought back to God in peace, and find forgiveness of sin in the exalted Saviour, every thing is lost indeed.

But good news from the Lord's land comes to this awakened wanderer. "Naomi heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord

had visited his people, in giving them bread." This was good news from her forsaken home. Here was the first ray of light which dawned on her darkened spirit. Here was the first spring of hope in her desolate and barren heart. All then was not lost. If she could only get back to Bethlehem again, all might be well once more. Thus the prodigal remembered, in the day of his misery, how many hired servants of his father had bread enough and to spare, while he was perishing with hunger. How true and beautiful is the application of this to every wanderer from God !

What precious intelligence does the Gospel bring to the guilty ! It declares the pardoning love of God. It proclaims complete atonement in the blood of Jesus. It announces full salvation in his merits and death. It exhibits God reconciled to those who have rebelled against him. It offers this reconciliation in a Divine Saviour. It teaches them that he is able to save unto the uttermost, all who come unto God

through him. It calls upon lost sinners to fly to Jesus. It assures the weary and the wretched that in Him there is help. It is good news to the perishing. There is bread enough and to spare. God hath visited his people in giving them bread. Why then should any die, when there is an all-sufficient Saviour for all? This is the message from Immanuel's land.

It comes to you as lost in guilt. It comes to you when you are in Moab, in the very midst of your transgressions. The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. This is the only qualification in you to which the Saviour looks. He desires you to feel that you are lost; to acknowledge that you are lost; and then to be willing and contented to be saved. Thus we are to deliver God's message of love to you. Thus we are to preach the Gospel to a world of sinners. It is of no consequence how guilty, how lost, how debased, how far astray from God you may be. O no. The blood

of Jesus Christ can cleanse you from all sin. In the fountain which he has opened, you may be washed as white as snow. The message comes to you. Hear it. Receive it. Rejoice in it. It is a message from God to each of you. Whosoever will may come, and eat and drink and live for ever. This is the intelligence which comes in the Gospel to guilty man. This is the message which seems so precious and encouraging to the mind of the awakened sinner. It is the Word of Life. It says to him, *Live* ; yea, it says to him, LIVE. And now there seems a hope, a bright and encouraging hope before him. Like the wounded Israelite, he can raise his languid eye to the brazen serpent. He can look upon the divine provision. He can behold Jesus with new feelings of consolation. His mourning heart is ready to say, with the most affectionate gratitude,

“Poor though I am, despised, forgot,
Yet God, my God, forsakes me not ;
And he is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.”

Then the awakened wanderer sets out at once on a return. Naomi "arose, that she might return from the country of Moab ; wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, on the way to return into the land of Judah." Yes—the very first thing, when your mind is awakened, and you see and feel your guilt, is to go back. Not to consider ; not to deliberate ; not to sit down and mourn over your losses and wretchedness. But to arise at once, and return to God, who will abundantly pardon. The prodigal said, "I will arise and go to my father." "And he arose and came to his father." This settled the whole matter. So Naomi "set out from the place where she was." This was her first immediate act. This must be yours. You want no preparation for your return to God but a sense of your need. Do you feel your guilt ? Do you see the folly of your sinful life ? Do you hear the news of divine forgiveness ? Then there is nothing more to be

done, but to accept the message from God, and to set out upon your return at once.

Many think they must first feel much, and mourn much, and suffer much, before they can hope to go back in peace to God. But why? Will your suffering save you? Will your multiplied tears add any thing to a Saviour's worth? Is Christ to be more sufficient because you have mourned so much? Can you make yourself in any way better before you come? Ah, how vain are all such thoughts! The first thing for you to do, is to go directly to the Saviour, with perfect confidence and hope, and with no fear. Is your dwelling on fire? And must you wait until you are scorched with the flames before you can escape in safety? Have you mistaken your road in journeying? And can you recover your lost steps the better by delay or hesitation, or fruitless grief? Nay. You want all the time for actual pursuit. You have none to waste. **TURN! TURN! FLY! FLY!** 'Tis madness to defer. When your conscience is

aroused, this is the next step—the first step. You can do nothing for your safety until you do this. Jesus is your refuge. You can have no safety until you flee to him. You need not wait an hour, or a moment. “Seek ye my face,” he says. Let your heart reply at once, “Thy face will I seek.” David says, “When thou shalt enlarge my heart, I will *run* the way of thy commandments.” “I made haste, I delayed not, to keep thy commandments.” Nay, further than this, he says he would not stop to breathe before he set out: “I opened my mouth, and *drew in my breath*, for I longed for thy commandments.” Set out from the very place where you are; with all your guilt, and all your degradation. Go just as you are, and ask and expect forgiveness.

“Just as I am, O waiting not
To rid my soul from one dark blot,
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
To thee, O Lamb of God, I come.”

Naomi goes to no other part of Moab; to no other land of idolatry. She goes directly

back to the land of Judah. This is a blessed example. How many go from one broken cistern to another, instead of going at once to the fountain of living waters. When the burden of sin and sorrow presses, some fly to worldly pleasure, and try to drown their sense of guilt in deeper sin. Some rush into unbelief, and strive, by voluntary infidelity, to drive off the precious Comforter who would lead them back to God. Some burden themselves with self-righteous superstitions ; with ceremonies, penances, and popery ; and try to find some way of safety among the blind passages, and dark dungeons which are opened before them there. But all these efforts are vain. Edom or Babylon are no better than Moab. No. You must fly to Bethlehem at once. Go directly to an offered Saviour. Go as a beggar. Go as a rebel. Go, feeling that you deserve to be condemned. But go. Go with hope. Go with trust. Go with assurance. Go without fear. He will not refuse you, nor reject you. He will in no wise cast

you out. Your safety and your hope depend upon an instant, decided, and undoubted return to God. Often this safety hangs upon a momentary decision. Your awakened mind is brought where you must decide positively on the one side or on the other. You must either absolutely accept or reject the Gospel. You must either affectionately submit to God, or peremptorily refuse the offer of his grace. Now is your accepted time. This is the day of your salvation.

I remember a young man whom I once met in my study for religious conversation. I found him one who had been gay, trifling, and carelessly living without God. But he was now awakened, serious, yet hesitating and proud. His wife, he said, was a religious woman. But he had been a neglecter of the whole subject of his own salvation. I conversed long with him. At last I said, "Now go home, and take your stand for Christ to-night; and tell your wife that the time past of your life has been enough for sin, and now

you mean to live for Christ, and the kingdom of God. Kneel down with her, and begin your united prayer to-night. Will you do this?" "No," he answered, "I can not." I vainly remonstrated with him. He was immovable. I then said, "I have nothing more to say." For some minutes we sat in silence. I asked him again, and again he refused. Silence again intervened, until, in a few minutes more he rose from his seat, and sighed deeply. The tears started from his eyes, and, as I asked him again, he answered me, "I will," and immediately left my house. The next evening I saw him entering our evening worship at the church, with a young woman leaning on his arm, whom I had often marked there as a stranger, and a woman of a sorrowful spirit. They came to the front seat immediately before me, and knelt down together in private prayer. Ah, how my heart rejoiced in the sight before me! It was the manifest sign to me that the Spirit of the Lord had gained the victory in his

heart. When the public service was concluded, I approached them, and asked him if this was his wife. He answered, yes. I told her what this young man had promised me to do the night before. "Did he do it?" "Yes," said she, "he did." "And how do you feel to-night," I said to him. "Sir," he exclaimed, "I am the happiest man in the City of Philadelphia." This young man walked faithfully in our midst for some years, as a servant of the Lord, and then, under a rapid consumption, he sunk in death. When near his hour of departure, I said to him, "Do you remember the evening when you first came to my study?" "Remember it?" said he, "I shall never forget it through all eternity. It was the birthday of my soul." And he raised his feeble hands, clasped them together, and, covering his face, burst into a flood of tears.

Ah, how much depended, in his case, upon that instant return to God! Like Naomi, "he rose up from the place where he was," and went directly to the Lord, who called

him to be his servant. There he found peace for ever. • He will praise God through eternity for the blessing of that night. This is the way of peace—the only way of peace. Thus the prodigal “arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” Thus the Saviour is ready to meet you, and to bless you all. Who is ready to rise up at once and go? He promises to receive you. He will in no wise cast you out. O come, hasten to him, and settle the great question for your soul, by a happy and faithful surrender of yourselves to him.

IV.

The Promising Commencement.

And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them: and they lifted up their voice and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to-night, and should also bear sons; would ye tarry for them till they were grown? Would ye stay for them from having husbands? Nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me."—RUTH, I. 8-13.

HERE we have the most happy and promising commencement of a new work. The awakened wanderer sets out on an immediate return. The Holy Spirit has showed him the guilt and loss of his past course, and has excited in him the earnest desire for pardon

and deliverance. He has taught him that with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. He has stirred him up to seek the Lord while he may be found ; and the sinner says, "I will go and return unto the Lord, for with him the fatherless findeth mercy."

But never does the really penitent sinner desire to return to God alone. An immediate sympathy makes him anxious for the salvation of those whom he loves. "Andrew findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Christ, and he brought him to Jesus." Moses said unto Hobab, his brother-in-law, "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it to you ; come thou with us, and we will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Naomi would not willingly leave her widowed daughters-in-law in Moab. Though she apparently discourages them, it is with the manifest design that they should go with her,

upon motives that should be permanent, and not disappointing. And this is the point of their history we have now to consider.

We see them all set out together, upon the same road, and apparently for the same result. "She went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on their way to return unto the land of Judah." No one who saw them set out upon their journey could anticipate that they would voluntarily separate, or imagine that one was more likely than the other to reach the end proposed. They all set out together. Orpah seemed as promising as Ruth. We are obliged to wait until succeeding trials shall bring their real characters individually to light, before we can discriminate between them. Thus the Lord teaches us in the parable of the sower. The same hand sowed the same seed on all the varieties of the ground. But the results which are produced differ most widely. Many listen together to the preaching of the Word

of God. Many feel together the burden of personal affliction and distress. Many are made to see their danger, and to remember their responsibility to God. Many appear to feel the guilt of their past sinful life, and to be really aroused in their mind and conscience to the necessity of obtaining salvation for their souls. By a great variety of means, God stirs up sinful men to seek after himself. Anxious, excited, apparently earnest and sincere, they set out upon their journey back to the gracious Being whom they have so long neglected. Yes ; they really set out, and appear to set out sincerely.

I do not mean that such persons feel their need and danger ; that they meditate seriously upon their return to God ; that they resolve they will go back. No. I mean that they actually begin their journey. The prodigal not only says, "I will arise and go to my father ;" he does arise and go. Even so far, it is an encouraging and happy commencement. But, my dear young friends,

there is more to be considered than this promising commencement. Thus far the Orpahs and the Ruths set out together. Moved by fear, or love, or desire, or sense of duty, they join Naomi in her journey back to Judah. They leave the place in which they have dwelt in Moab. They travel together in the same path, toward the final boundary between Moab and Judah. They seem engaged for the same object, and in the same enterprise. The sins and follies of this outward world, they all, for a season, relinquish. The assemblies of Christians for worship, they unite to attend. The habit of private prayer and reading of the Scriptures, they all, for a season, adopt. Perhaps in the most public way and form, they may together avow themselves the servants of the Lord. Whatever can be done in religious appearance, in the world, and without an absolute separation of heart from the world, they may have in common. The wise and foolish virgins both take their lamps and go forth

to meet the bridegroom. Thus all go together "on the way to return into the land of Judah." As far as this journey lies still within the limits of Moab, so far they may unite to go. Up to a certain point, they must take the same path, and travel in the same direction.

Ah, how many of these young travelers have I seen ! The Church delighted over them. The pastor rejoiced in them. Christian friends were encouraged by them. The brightest and most blessed hopes clustered around them. The Lord only, who knoweth the hearts of the children of men, could have told us which were the Orpahs, and which were the Ruths of this hopeful company. He knoweth them that are his, and can not be deceived. His judgment at the last separates the precious and the vile, divides the gold from the dross, and assigns to each his own place. But that judgment he does not announce to us in advance. He makes experience prove them ; and bids us mark the trial.

As he said of Gideon's soldiers, "Bring them down to the water, and I will try them for thee there," so he proves our young travelers for us, and we are soon made to see who they are "that draw back into perdition," and who they are "that believe to the saving of the soul." For a season they must be allowed to go on together. Awakened, convinced, interested in religion, apparently equally determined, they set out well. We welcome their commencement. We encourage them to perseverance. We bid them hope on to the end, for the grace that shall be given them. We urge them to lay hold on eternal life, and see that no man take their crown. Happy should we be did they all receive our exhortation.

But we must follow our travelers in their journey, and see why and where they separate. As we thus follow them, we see them meet with many trials of faith and patience on the road. Little is said of the events of Naomi's journey. But it is an easy imagina-

tion to describe the trials in their path. Three lonely, beggared women, undertaking, without protection, a journey like that from Moab to Bethlehem, must expect many trials in the way. They go back empty. And all the sorrows of their poverty, their solitude, their weakness, their want of defense, and their fears even of the final result of their undertaking, are easily seen and imagined by us. Much was to be given up. Much was to be encountered. Much was to be feared. And it required the strongest and purest motives of conduct, to endure the trial. Ah, how accurately the illustration applies to our purpose of instruction ! What difficulties the awakened mind finds in its attempt to return to God ! And if we leave out of our view the renewing and triumphant power of the Holy Spirit which leads the sincere heart on from grace to glory, how many trials of faith and patience do these difficulties present !

Your former habits of sin are to be renounced. Your secret faults, your lines of

conscious transgression, known only to yourselves, are to be cast away. Many indulgences and gratifications that you have loved, are to be thrown aside for ever. Many corrupting and ensnaring ways of the present evil world, to which you have been accustomed, are to be avoided. The habits of Moab, habits which, until now, you never knew or thought to be wrong or ruinous, are to be opposed. With them you are to maintain no concord or agreement. This is the putting off the old man, corrupted with deceitful lusts, and strengthened by long indulgence. It must be faithfully accomplished. The deeds and customs of Moab can not follow you to Judah. You can not live in sin, and be conformed to the world, and yet live and walk in Christ. No. You must break off your sins by righteousness. The old things must pass away. And this is a great trial of faith and patience. If it could be done by a single struggle, if one fight could end the contest, the work would be comparatively

easy. But you can not leap thus with a single bound from Moab to Judah. And this long-continued journey, these repeated struggles with sin, these frequent defeats by the power of remaining evil, these distressing fears lest you shall never get through in safety, lest you shall at last make shipwreck by the way—ah, my young friends, well do I know what trials of faith and patience they inevitably bring. If you were left alone, unprotected and unguided, you would surely perish by the way.

But, in addition to these, new habits of conduct and feeling are to be acquired. The habit of secret prayer in your closet and your chamber—the habit of constant, earnest study of the Word of God—the habit of watchfulness over your easily-besetting sins—the habit of caution in your allowed indulgences—the habit of consideration and discernment in your relations and company—the habit of resistance to your inward propensities to evil—the habit of silence from sinful and foolish

talking—the habit of kindness in expressions, manners, and actions toward others—the habit of disinterestedness and activity in your efforts to do good to all—and, above all, the habit of constant remembrance of God your Saviour, and of simple, earnest faith in his presence, protection, and help ; all these, if I should mention no more, are to be acquired, cultivated, and maintained. If all this could be done by a single effort, it would be easy work. But that is impossible. It is a journey of successive steps, of continued progress ; and you have to press forward in it with the utmost determination, and the most sincere desire. You may pass through many discouragements and defeats in this constant effort to put on the new man, renewed and holy after the Saviour's image. Faith and patience will have many trials before it can be completely done. And if the blessed Spirit of God did not constantly uphold and aid you, all your own efforts would be in vain. But I now speak of these things only as the subjects

of your own effort. And well I know the difficulties of the work.

But above all these habits of outward life, you have to come with the deep sense of sin, with a consciousness that you are condemned and destitute, with an entire refusal to trust in any virtue or excellence of your own, and to cast yourself in an affectionate and simple trust at your Saviour's feet.

"Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Jesus, or I die."

Yes. You are there to believe that you are forgiven, accepted, blessed in him, though you are perfectly guilty and helpless in yourself. Against this humbled, self-renouncing temper, every thing in your own self-righteous heart struggles and contends unceasingly. The very hardest thing in this journey from Moab to Judah is to maintain a feeling of your own helplessness, and an affectionate confidence in the Saviour who has redeemed you, and is guiding you to glory. And yet this is indispensable. All who set out on

this return to God must meet with these various trials of faith and patience on the road. Whether they are real penitents or not, whether they are truly led by the Holy Spirit or not, whether they prove to be Orpahs or Ruths in the result of the trial, there is no other way in which they can go. And though it seems to be hard, and Orpah finds it so, and gives up, wearied, disgusted, and a cast-away, yet it is not really hard to a heart that loves the Saviour. Ruth finds nothing in it which can separate her from the Lord whom she loves, and whom she has really chosen as her portion for ever.

We see these young travelers meet with many discouragements to their return. How earnestly Naomi argues with them to search what manner of spirits they were of! How kindly she presses them to go back, and find their shelter and their rest among the friends whom they were leaving! How she presses upon their remembrance that she has nothing to offer them, no hopes, no promises to hold

out, of present or prospective worldly gain ! How she mingles the expressions of her gratitude and her grief, in order the more effectually to impress them with a conviction of the earthly poverty of the journey ! Again and again she kissed them in token of farewell. Again and again they wept in protestations of their fidelity and determination. How affecting, and how promising seems such an interview ! Read again these pathetic verses. Did Naomi really wish to discourage them ? Did she really desire them to go back ? Was she willing to leave them in Moab ? Did Orpah gratify her more than Ruth ? Far from this. She would try their faith and their affection. She would know what was in their heart. She would see how long and how truly she might trust them hereafter. And therefore she lays before them the sorrows of the journey, and the barrenness of the earthly prospect.

Thus the gracious Saviour proves the disciples who gather around him. How faith-

fully he warned those who followed him when he was on the earth ! He told them the trials they must meet. The disciple could not be above his master. The world reproached, persecuted, killed him. Those who followed must drink of the same cup, and be baptized with the same baptism. He had not where to lay his head. In the service of such a master they could expect no earthly wealth or power. They would find his service brought not worldly peace, but a sword. Unless, therefore, they loved him enough to be happy in parting with every thing else for him, and suffering every thing for his sake, they could not be his disciples. Did he mean to discourage them, or to drive them away ? Did he wish them to leave him, and walk with him no more ? Far, far from that. He desired to prove them, to bring out to their own view the secret motives of their hearts, and to let them see and determine whether they could still follow him, when they had no earthly benefit to expect in his service. When

they had thus been tried, and could feel able to say from their hearts, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that we love thee," then their way was safe, happy, and sure, whatever trials of faith and patience it might bring them, on the road.

Thus the Saviour still tries the youthful disciples who come to him. He bids you remember that you have nothing to expect in this world, of mere worldly advantages, in his service. He will make you happy in serving him. But it is not with worldly happiness. He will give you peace in him. But that will be in your losses for his sake, and in your willingness to part with all for him. When you come to serve the Lord, you must prepare your soul for temptation. From the day you set out on your heavenly journey, discouragements and difficulties will seem to multiply around you.

The world will be arrayed against you. The habits, opinions, and plans of worldly people are constant obstacles in your way.

They will ridicule you. They will frown upon you. They will scoff at you. They will entice you. They will attempt to bewilder you with arguments and objections. They will often compel you either to yield to them, or to live and walk alone. They will be often in your families and households ; it may be, your nearest earthly relations, whom it is impossible to avoid, and wicked to despise. Ah, this discouragement is very great. And whether I hear the enemy blowing the trumpet of threatening hostility, or breathing the soft notes of attraction and enticement around you, I look upon your young religion with the deepest anxiety and concern. How will you stand it ? What is to be the result of it ? God only can make you stand.

The professed Christians around you are often fearful obstacles in your way. You see and hear of old communicants to whom the theater, the opera, the ball-room, appear just as easily habitual as the church. You

hear of professed ministers of the Gospel apologizing for habits of the most complete devotion to the world. You see those who profess to follow Christ, in many instances living just as gayly, as extravagantly, as indulgently, often as sinfully, as if they had made no such profession. Few of them love to talk with you of Christ. Fewer still to pray with you for his blessing. They appear to be in the world, of the world, with the world, part of the world, and you can see no difference between the two, except in some occasional public religious observance. Ah, how sad is the influence which such professors exercise! How painful to the young Christian traveler, the trial of faith and patience which such disappointments in character present! You may often sigh for a religious encouragement from them which you do not find; and for a sympathy for your tempted and struggling soul which they seem wholly unable to feel. This discouragement is great.

Your own inward heart and feelings will

often be very discouraging to you. There is such backwardness in prayer—such want of deep interest in the Word and service of God ;—there are such multiplied risings of the sinful nature that seems to be dwelling within you ;—there is so little of the excitement which you hoped to find—so little sensible enjoyment often in your new path—such a necessity for constant warfare, and constant watchfulness within yourself. If you relax a moment, you fall. If you stop to rest, you sink in hazardous, ruinous lethargy and slumber. Your conscience often seems little at peace ; such a sense of sin prevails, and pervades through your secret thoughts. The toiling up and down these hills of Moab—the hours of weariness which must be passed before you see the promised land before you—the many dangers to be met before you can say or feel that you are safe ;—Ah, these are great discouragements, great trials to your faith and patience. Nothing can stand them or endure through them but a heart that

really loves Jesus more than all the world, and a spirit that willingly sacrifices itself for his service and glory. If this is your heart and spirit, then all these discouragements are instruments of new strength. Orpah may feel dispirited and weary. Ruth only loves the more, the more she is tried. To Orpah the way grows more unattractive and tedious as she goes on. To Ruth, every step brings new determination, and new desire to press on even to the end.

Thus we see these young travelers set out. They go on together. Again they said to Naomi, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." She was happy in not knowing yet the difference between them. She could therefore encourage both with the assurance, that what she had they should have, and where she should find a home, they also should participate with her. It is our place to encourage all who appear to set out sincerely in the Lord's service. It is not for us to turn any back. We stand at the Saviour's

door, glad to receive all who are willing to come. He only can search the heart. We are not to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax. We cast the Saviour's net, and strive to bring it to the shore. He only can separate the evil from the good, and say who are his, and who is holy. We give the Saviour's gracious invitations to all who hear. We beg them to come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. We say to all our youth, "Ye are bought with a price. Come to the Saviour's feet. Come to the Shepherd's tent. Come one. Come all. Why should any of you remain to perish in Moab. Come, find your home in the house of the Lord for ever." It is for the Lord alone to say, "How camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment?" We urge you, then, my dear young friends, now to begin your journey to life eternal, to become at once the friends and followers of our glorious Lord, to give your names and your hearts to Christ, and to join us in our

happy pilgrimage to the land of everlasting rest, to receive the wedding-garment of his perfect righteousness and glorious salvation, and become the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. It will be a blessed day for you on which you thus set out. It will be a perfectly sure and prosperous journey for you, if you sincerely enter upon it, with your heart determined to serve and follow the Great Captain of our Salvation who goes before us. You need never turn back to the vanities and sins of Moab which you thus renounce. Your path may be "like the shining light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come ; and let him that heareth say, Come ; and let him that is athirst come ; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

V.

The Painful Separation.

And they lifted up their voices, and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods; return thou after thy sister-in-law."—RUTH, I. 14, 15.

NOTHING can be more encouraging to the Christian heart than to see the young setting out to seek the Lord. It is a beautiful exercise and exhibition of youth. Never do the morning hours appear so bright or so promising. God hath said, "They that seek me early shall find me." We well know that some will go back who appear to set out well. Our past experience leads us not to hope too confidently in individual cases, or to expect too much of particular persons. But we know that none can gain the blessings unless

they do set out. There is a necessary beginning to a religious life, as well as to human life itself. There is a commencement to our heavenly journey as well as to our earthly journey. And as we can never know in the beginning who will persevere, or who will draw back, we rejoice to see them all set out. We can not suspect the sincerity of any, and therefore we encourage them and urge them all to press forward, and be faithful unto death, and not to lose the crown and prize for which they start.

We have seen these youthful travelers going with Naomi out of the place where they dwelt, on the way to return unto the land of Judah. For a time they travel together happily and affectionately. There seems no prospect of their separation. We have no reason yet to suspect the integrity or the love of either of the two. But they come at last to a point, where, if they are to separate, the hour of separation has arrived. There is a line which divides Moab from Judah. Naomi

has no question in her plans. She is certainly going on, whatever trials the journey may cost. All her hopes and interests are in Judah. If her daughters-in-law mean to go with her, or if either of them has wavered in the determination, here is the point at which they must finally decide. Perhaps it is not easy to decide. There are many reasons and motives to be weighed and considered, before they finally decide. There are many interests involved in the decision. Difficulties and objections arise on both sides. But the decision must be made. It may be they will delay the decision as long as they can. If either of them shall hesitate to go further, the kindness and love of the other will labor to postpone the final determination. But this final determination can not be avoided. It must be met at last. And this is the subject of our present thought, *the painful separation*. Orpah at last avows the real purpose of her heart. She kisses her mother-in-law in a final farewell, and goes back to her

people and her gods. Ruth cleaves to her, and goes forward with her to the land of Judah, and to the people and the God of Israel. Nothing can separate her love from Naomi. Nothing shall be allowed to turn her back from seeking and serving Naomi's God.

This is a painful, but an inevitable crisis. The two sisters must separate. They actually do separate. They have loved each other. They have dwelt together, rejoiced together, mourned together, suffered together, journeyed together. But they have come to a point at which they find they have no longer a real sympathy, or a common object in life, or the same state of mind and feeling. And these affectionate friends must separate. Two can not walk together, except they be agreed. In the main end and purpose of their journey—in the direction in which they shall journey—they do not agree. They must separate.

There is just such a line in our soul's history, my dear young friends, where a similar entire separation must take place. The dear-

est friends, the nearest relations, parents and children, sisters and brothers, are compelled to divide, and choose entirely different and contrary paths. The awakened mind sees its own sinfulness and need, acknowledges the darkness and emptiness of the Moab in which it has dwelt, and to which it has belonged ; and truly feels the importance and the value of those blessed offers and promises, which the Gospel proclaims. The Holy Spirit has taught the sinner the guiltiness and wretchedness of his past life ; and has made him feel how much better it would be for him to be really a Christian, and a child of God. He knows, he sees, he feels the truth. But he does not love the truth. He does not embrace and choose it for his own, his portion for ever. He acknowledges his sinfulness. He mourns over his wasted life. He confesses the blessedness and peace which they have who love and serve the Lord. He hears the invitation addressed to him, to come and partake of the same blessedness in the Redeemer of the lost.

He comes to a line where he must either choose the Saviour, and go with him, or refuse him, and go back again to his rebellion and sin. He must choose whom he will serve ; for to serve one master or the other—either the Saviour or the destroyer—is his unavoidable portion. He needs no more light or knowledge. He fully sees the misery and danger of his state. He knows that he is not a Christian, and can not be safe in this condition of his soul. He wants now only the actual forgiveness and renewing of his heart which the Gospel offers him. His mind is enlightened. His conscience is awakened. His judgment is convinced. And nothing remains but to give his heart to Jesus, and to say, in humble dependence on his grace, “Lord, I will go with thee ; thou hast the words of eternal life. I am thy servant ; thou hast loosed my bonds.”

If he would really do this, all would be well. But this he refuses. His heart he can not, will not give to Christ. Any thing else

he will do. But nothing else will avail him any thing. He will be baptized. But baptism can not save him. He will be confirmed. But this is not salvation. He will come to the table of the Lord. But there is no salvation for him there. He will fast and pray. He will toil and labor in his own self-righteous plans. He will try to cleanse the outside of the cup and the platter, and resolve to walk religiously in outward works. But all this is not salvation. He will not believe with his heart in the Lord Jesus. He will not yield his willing soul a dwelling-place for Christ. He will not give himself freely up, as a living sacrifice to the divine Saviour. He will not believe the precious assurances of his Word. He will not, can not choose to be the Lord's alone. This is a line he can not cross. And here he must separate from the people of God, though they have traveled long together. They must go on, and he will not. They can not tarry for him, and he still hesitates to arise and go.

Poor Orpah ! How often have I seen young travelers to eternity stopping just where you stop ; hesitating just where you hesitate ; and then going back just where you go back. Nothing more can be done for you where you are. There is Moab. You have tried that, and found it empty and unhappy. There is Judah. All its provisions and offers are before you, and brought for your acceptance. Never will you be sorry if you take your portion there. Here are Naomi and Ruth. They are journeying to the land which the Lord hath promised them. Soon they will be far from you, out of your sight. Then you will mourn over the separation which you foolishly made.

“ While you gaze, with speed surprising
Down the vale they sink from sight ;
Gazing still, you see them rising,
Like an angel, clothed in light.”

Why will you not go with them, and with them become an heir together of the grace of life ? But Orpah goes back—to her people and to her gods.

It is a painful separation. "They lifted up their voices and wept." Naomi and Ruth mourn with the sincerest pity. Many a time will they look back and exclaim in sorrow, "Oh, Orpah, Orpah ! that thou hadst been wise, at least in this thy day, to think of the things which belong unto thy peace ! But now they are hidden from thine eyes." The true children of God can not help sorrowing over those whom they are compelled to leave behind to perish in the world. Far enough are they from triumphing over them in their lost estate. Ah, my brother ! Ah, sister ! Ah, my child ! will often burst from many a happy heart that really has no other earthly sorrow than this. In all their journey to the kingdom which they are to receive, they will call these children of vanity to their mind. In secret places they will weep over them, and pray for them. Often from some hill-top on their road, will they turn back to look, and strain their sight to discover if they may not even yet be following them far be-

hind. It seems inscrutable, inexplicable to them. Why will they perish? So simple, so easy, so happy, appears the salvation of the Gospel, that they wonder why any should reject its offers, or refuse their part in the blessings which it brings. Every step in the journey is pleasanter and happier than the last. The ways of religion seem to be the ways of pleasantness and peace. The path to Immanuel's land becomes all the time less burdensome and more attractive. And often the thought comes over the mind, as some poor worldly friend and companion is remembered, "O that they knew how great peace we have, who love his law." The most tender sympathy and desire for those who are still in the world, unpardoned and unsaved, is a constantly increasing influence in their hearts, to the end of their course. And to them it is a painful, heart-rending separation, which divides the children of God from the children of the world.

But Naomi and Ruth do not weep alone.

Orpah finds the separation as painful as they. Sad to her was the moment when they turned their backs upon each other, and she began alone the way of her return. Sad was every succeeding moment, as she journeyed back alone to her people and her gods. Naomi and Ruth she really loved. It was no desire to leave them which made her separate from them. And could we know her history, we should doubtless find in it many a sorrowful and weeping hour, as she thought of these friends of her youth, whom she was to see no more.

It is the history which we have seen in the child of the world, over and over again. You may renounce the Saviour, and walk with him no more. You may go back to Moab, and bury yourself in its sins and follies. But you will find no peace or happiness there. Your conscience will never again allow you to rest. You may plunge into gratifications and indulgences. You may pretend to be pleased. But it is all pretense. Your heart is hollow,

self-condemning, and sad. You may try to hate and oppose the truth. You may avoid the Gospel, and the church of God. You may resolve you will not feel, and will not think. But ah, it is all in vain. Many an hour of reflection and sorrow will come, when your own hypocrisy will accuse and condemn you. Then you will bitterly feel how mad and foolish has been the course you have pursued. Whether you choose a Saviour or oppose him, the world can never meet your wants, or minister peace to your soul. You will come to sorrow, and weep alone. You will come to poverty, and find no support. You will come to sickness, and have no comforter. You will come to death, and possess no hope. You will look forward to eternity in dark despair. There will be many a time in your life when you will recall the hour in which you were almost a Christian with unutterable anguish. From some distant hill of Moab your eye will catch a view of Naomi and Ruth, calmly and steadfastly accomplish-

ing their journey, and your soul will sink under the sad recollection that you also might have been with them, and have rejoiced in the blessed hopes and prospects which they possess. Ah, never think of finding peace in Moab. Your own heart will condemn you. The world itself will despise you. God will seem to frown upon you every day. All things will appear to be against you there. There is no peace there. You will feel and acknowledge to yourself the happiest day of your life was that on which you set out to seek the Lord ; the saddest, that on which you turned back to find your portion in the world. "They lifted up their voices and wept" again. And thus will Orpah often do in the remembrance of the folly of this day.

Painful, however, as the separation may be, Orpah will go no further. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law." It was the respectful but sad token of the inward state of her own mind. This was now her choice, her own voluntary determination. It was vain to say

she could not go. There was no other real difficulty than that which was within herself. There was a price put into her hands to get wisdom, but she had no heart to it. The inducements were not powerful enough to overcome her aversion to the journey. The object did not seem a sufficient compensation for the difficulties to be met. The separation from her friends in Moab required a sacrifice which she had not the heart to make. And, worst of all, the foul and filthy gods of Moab she still really preferred to the worship and service of the God of Israel. Orpah acts out her own choice and her own determination in a perfectly voluntary return. She certainly might have gone on with her companions had she desired it. But her heart is still in Moab, and to Moab she chooses to go back.

Can you ever give any other account of a sinful refusal of the Saviour's love, and apostasy from his service? "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." "O that there were such an heart in them that they would

fear me and keep my commandments !” The offers and invitations of the Gospel are given to you with perfect freedom. The divine Spirit works within you to teach you the truth, and to guide you in the heavenly way. God gives you power and strength to do his will, according to your day. But he requires you always to choose for yourself whom you will serve. Your service must be perfect freedom. When his children accept his offered mercy, and give themselves up to his service, it is a perfectly cheerful and voluntary act. And when you refuse his grace, and draw back from his commandments, you feel that you act with perfect freedom, and do simply that which you desire to do. However long you may halt between two opinions, you do finally choose for yourself whether you shall serve God or Baal. If you go back to the world, you choose death rather than life—you love darkness rather than light. You are therefore without excuse, and can blame

none but yourselves when you reap the bitter fruits of your own sowing.

Thus, like Orpah, you stand. The Saviour invites you. You will not come. He assures you of his forgiveness. You will not believe him. He offers you his free salvation. You refuse to receive it. He holds out to you his boundless gifts of love. You will not stretch forth your hands to receive them. He says to you, Open thy mouth and I will fill it. You clench your teeth, and refuse to comply. He begs you. He intreats you. Why will you die? You turn from him with your own free determination, and choose the death against which he so solemnly warns you. It may be you do all this respectfully, quietly, and with an expression of regret. But you do it freely, and of your own full accord. "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law." But she deserted her, and went "back to her people and her gods." Ah, this is a fearful responsibility. You pluck down ruin on your own head. You plunge

your precious soul into a voluntary destruction. And when we fondly hoped you would travel with us to our Father's house, we see you turn your back upon us, and join yourself to strangers, and go with the destroyer. Yet you take the whole responsibility upon yourself. Your final destruction is your own act, and the result of your own choice. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, when in me was thy help." Painful was the separation. But it was still the more so on this account. It was Orpah's own unfaithful choice.

Orpah goes "back to her people and her gods." This is a most important fact in her history. She does not, can not remain where they part. That is a place most unnatural and unattractive. No ; she goes back, while Ruth and Naomi go forward. The separation grows wider every hour. They are more and more apart, as each day traces their different courses. She may often think of them when she is among her people and

her gods. She may often regret that she left them. She may wish over and over again that she were with them once more. But the separation is final. She joins them no more. This is a most affecting illustration. The awakened and convinced mind can never abide at the line where a Saviour is refused. There is no permanency in such a state of mind. There is no home for the soul there. When once you have thus grieved the Holy Ghost, and driven the Lord Jesus from the door of your heart, and answered to his invitation, "I will not come ;" then the guiding Spirit leaves you, the restraining grace is withdrawn from you, the dews and the rain of the Lord's Word fall upon you in vain.

Yes—you go back. It may be to self-indulgence, dissipation, and sensual delights. It may be to giddiness, frivolity, and empty, cheerless mirth. It may be to business, covetousness, and unceasing occupation. It may be to infidelity, and assumed unbelief and argument. It may be to open hostility and per-

secution of the Gospel, and those who love it. It may be to absolute and dreadful hardness of heart. But to whatever it shall be, you still go back. The more conscience disturbs you within, still with the more determination you go back. You resolve that Moab shall be your home ; its people, your people ; its gods, your gods. The worst opposers of the Gospel we ever meet are those who once were almost Christians. The bitterest persecutors of Christ are those who once set out well to be his servants and friends. It was a fallen disciple who sold Him to his enemies, and went and hanged himself. Sad is the history of this return to Moab. What you shall be, it does not now appear. Could we trace the history of many a backslider, as events will bring it out, he would start back with the exclamation, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?"

You fall, and ah, how deeply ! And when you attempt to follow out this worldly course, what have you gained ? What can you gain ?

“There is no peace to the wicked.” Had you the whole world as your price, it would leave your heart just as wretched and empty still. It will have been better for you never to have known the way of truth. The very heathen will rise up in the judgment with you and condemn you.

But you say you will hereafter return to Christ. You can not do this, but by his own Spirit. And that Spirit you have driven far from you. There is a morning which cometh on the earth when the night has passed. But you have chosen darkness which has no succeeding light. There is a spring that returneth in creation, when the winter has gone. But you have buried the sacred seed of your soul's welfare beneath a winter which knows no coming spring. You will mourn at the last, when your flesh and your body are consumed. But it will be with a worldly sorrow which worketh death, and not with a godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. No, never, so far as man can say,

will you return again. You have resisted all the influence you can ever receive. You have rejected all the light and arguments which will ever be bestowed. Your necessary course, your inevitable course, is to sink still further down in the path of your chosen sin, until God has sworn in his wrath you shall not enter into his rest. You go "back to your people and your gods." But you find no rest there. You doom yourself to a life of sorrow and a death of despair. And when the earth and the sea shall give up their dead, "reprobate silver shall men call you, for the Lord hath rejected you."

Many years since I was called, late at night, to visit a young man, dying, at a boarding-house in my neighborhood. He was an officer in the army, returning from the Florida war. He was a model of youthful beauty. His black hair curled over a forehead like alabaster, and his long eyelashes shaded eyes of the most brilliant hue. His countenance was deeply interesting. I sat beside him, and

began to tell him of the Saviour's dying love ; of the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb for sinners. "Don't talk to me of that," he exclaimed ; "I will not hear you. I know it all as well as you. I know it is all true. I was taught it in my youth. I loved it then. But I gave it up. I threw my Bible away. I tried to disbelieve it. I scoffed at it. And now it is impossible. I know it is all true. But it is not for me." I entreated him to hear me, but he would not. Vainly did I pour out the riches of the Redeemer's grace before him. "It is not for me. I knew it once. But it is too late now." He became intensely excited. I said at last, let me pray for you. "No, you shall not. No man shall pray for me. I will not hear you." I persisted. But he covered himself over with the bed-clothes, and turned his back to me, and tried to keep out the very sound of the words. My effort was vain. I returned to my house at midnight. Early in the morning I went round again. But the crape suspended to the

bell-handle told me he was gone. It was a sorrowful departure. The departure of a young apostate.

This is the fearful prospect in your return with Orpah. O, my young friends, drive the tempter from you. Listen to the voice of the Spirit. Hear the Saviour's call. See the attractive glories of Immanuel's land. Cast in your lot with the people of God. Come, go thou with us to Bethlehem, and feed upon that bread of God which giveth life for ever.

VI.

True Decision.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.—RUTH, i. 16-18.

WE have just stood at the line which separates Moab from Judah. We have parted with Orpah, and have seen her go back to her people and her gods. Ah, who could look upon her but with distress? How much she has lost! What a sacrifice she has made! How vain and foolish has been her choice! How certain is it that she will find it so in the end! How sad will be her future sorrow, coming too late! Like poor Esau, who sold

his birthright and lost his blessing. Though he cried with an exceeding bitter cry, "My father, hast thou but one blessing? Bless me also, O my father,"—he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

This dividing line we find running between the kingdom of God and the guilty world of men. There is this actual, entire division between the children of God, and the children of the wicked one. They are completely separated. You can not mingle them permanently together. You may try, like some little child, to make the oil and water mix, by unceasing shaking, but they separate again, and go each to their own place. The awakened mind, led by the convincing Spirit of God, comes up to this line of separation, and there must choose, and there does choose, whom it shall serve, and with whom it shall go.

Many there, convinced, but not converted—feeling and knowing that they ought to fol-

low Jesus, but not willing to give up all things for his sake—almost, but not altogether Christians—turn back with Orpah, and we see them no more. The church of God travels onward to its glorious home. They who are saved are added to it, and travel onward with it. They who have refused the offers of redeeming love, are left, and must be left, to reap the harvest they have chosen for themselves to sow.

And here we stand to-day. Orpah has gone. We shall trace her course no longer. We would gladly never see her example followed by others. We must now confine ourselves to the beautiful decision and faithful choice of Ruth. She stands before us, a sincere youthful convert to the Lord's service. She has decided the question for her soul, by gratefully accepting the offers of a Saviour's love. This question will never come up for her consideration again. Henceforth she is not her own. She belongs to Christ her Saviour. And she will glorify him in her body

and her spirit, which are his. Surely never was there a more beautiful exhibition of character. Never was there a more dignified and graceful display of female loveliness and fidelity. Painting, sculpture, and poetry, have each in their turn selected it for their theme. Each may have caught some of its glow of attractive excellence. But, after all, the beauty of the original transcends their power of imitation. Never can we exhaust its attractions, or meditate too frequently on the perfection of the example which it presents. I beg you, my dear young friends, to think well of the example of this youthful convert, in the decision which she displays, and the choice which she makes. The circumstances in the midst of which her decision is displayed are peculiarly instructive to you all.

She sets out upon an untried journey alone. Naomi, indeed, is with her. And her heart is affectionately bound to her mother-in-law. But Ruth has many cares, trials, and remembrances of which Naomi is not conscious. To

Naomi, the journey is a well-known return. To Ruth, every step is untried and new. She was born in Moab. She knows nothing of Judah. All her associations and earthly connections are in Moab. And from them she goes out alone. Thus is it with every youthful convert. The experienced and aged Christian has much acquaintance with the way in which you go. The new-born child of grace takes every step on ground unknown and untried. Whatever sympathy or kindness you may receive in the Lord's service from his faithful people, with whom you have united your lot, much of your experience is, after all, peculiar to yourself. Your chief trials are within yourself, and wholly your own. Often will you question on the road, whether your case is not completely singular, whether any one was ever tried as you are tried, or suffered as you suffer. The secret sins which come to light in your own heart—the contests and difficulties which arise in your own tempers and mind, the temptations

of your own evil appetites and thoughts, will often make you think yourself isolated and solitary in the trials which you bear. Does any other one so suffer in prayer, and so often contend without success, and so often try in vain to do the will of God, and feel so much discouraged, and so often downcast under manifest and unexpected failures in duty? How often does this whole history come before a pastor's mind, from the statement of some suffering, struggling child of God—when it is but a perfect counterpart of the sorrows and discouragements which he is bearing within himself! As face answereth to face in the water, so does the heart of man to heart. This is the way in which all must go who would walk with God. "This people shall dwell alone." Each one, be the multitude ever so great, is a hidden one with God. Multitudes may be traveling in the same direction, but the feelings and experience of each are solitary. "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself." Ruth must make her

decision in her own secret heart, and make it for herself alone.

Her earthly friends must all be left. They are in Moab, from whence she takes now her final departure. This separation is not to be made without a trial of her faith. The more affectionate she is in her real choice, the more she will feel the separation from those whom she leaves behind. Religion can not destroy our earthly affections, our interest in those who are dear to us in natural ties. Nay, it much increases the warmth and power of our love. The world hardens the heart. The Gospel makes it tender, gentle, and affectionate. Sin makes us selfish. True piety makes us disinterested, generous, and kind. They are the fashionable, the prosperous, the gay, whose time and thoughts are occupied with their own indulgences, gains, and gratifications, whose hearts become hardened against the needs and sorrows of their fellow-men. They who love God will love their earthly friends also. And in the

very degree in which they love God, will they love those whom God hath connected with them. Ruth can not look back upon the many whom she has left in Moab without sincere and deep regret. O that all her friends might be partakers of the same glorious hope, and would pursue with her the same blessed journey to seek the living and true God.

This is a separation which must be made. You can not serve God and Mammon. You can not be partakers of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. We do not ask you to leave your earthly friends in outward relations. We do not ask you to fly to the desert, or to imprison yourselves in convents. This is the perversion of Satan in the scheme of Popery. You are required to serve the Lord in the condition in which he has placed you; to abide in the calling wherein you are called. He fixes the bounds of your habitations, and appoints you the trials you are to bear. From these it is vain to fly to sisterhoods and

cells, as if you could better do the will of God in outward seclusion. The world and Satan will follow you there. The prince of evil, whose power is like the air, is not to be shut out by bolts and bars. You are to follow the gracious Saviour in the world by a life separate from the world ; with a spirit and heart not of the world, though in its midst. Thus only is your light to shine where others may see ; and your example to be made a blessing that others may follow it.

This decision may often meet with much opposition from those with whom you dwell. Your dearest earthly connections may oppose. They love you. But they do not love your religion. Would you mix the two together ; would you only accompany them to the same excess of riot ; and, while the Sabbath led to the house and table of the Lord, allow the week to lead you to the palaces of Satan and the assemblies of those who have not God in all their thoughts, they could bear with you. Would you make your religion merely an out-

ward and separable form, they would be willing to yield to you. But if you take a decided and faithful stand on the side of Christ, they feel that your whole course is a reproof to them. To true religion, living, active, decided piety, the spirit and habits of the world are irreconcilably opposed. What are you to do? What can you do, but faithfully and simply follow Him who has said, "Whosoever loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"? You must go forth with Ruth, and leave those who, rejecting Jesus, will not go with you. You must follow the Lord fully, though you follow him alone among your earthly connections; and he will make those who oppose at peace with you. Be faithful to him, and your fidelity shall be the source of increased confidence and respect, even from the worldly who appear to reject and despise you. You may suffer a little at the outset. It is a temporary suffering. Your usefulness to others will be vastly increased.

God will give you many seals of his blessing on your efforts to honor him in the world in which he has placed you. And you will find a happy and blessed result in the end.

As we trace the history of Ruth, we find her meeting with new trials of her faith and decision after she sets out alone. Orpah has gone. But still Naomi proves the spirit of Ruth. Your sister has gone back to her people and her gods. If you mean ever to go back, now is your best time to go. Think well of what you give up, and of what you may encounter in accompanying me. Much as I would love to have you go with me, I do not wish you hereafter to feel disappointed or grieved on my account. Remember I have nothing to offer you. If you go with me, it must be to be a partner of my griefs and wants.

Thus God often proves the young disciple with new trials. He sends his east wind upon the young trees of his planting; not to weaken or destroy, but to give greater

strength and endurance for the time to come. Our real conversion to Him is an hour of peace and blessedness ; but it is not an end of trial. Nay, it is the very beginning of new contests ; and our fidelity in the decision we have made is to be proved at once, and to be proved constantly, by new dispensations of the will of God. Within and without, difficulties which we never found before arise upon us now. We had hoped that the day of temptation and trial had passed. And the day of fruitless sorrow and trial has passed. The trials we now meet are the divine system of blessing to us. They are the treasuring up of abiding benefits for our possession. Thus our Divine Captain strengthens and prepares his soldiers for their warfare and their victory. This is the work which he has for them to do. When we hear Naomi using the language of distrust to Ruth, we are ready to feel that she makes the burden unnecessarily heavy. Has she not already separated from her sister, and seen her go

back alone? Why should not her mother-in-law now encourage her, and help her onward in the journey which she has chosen and commenced? Why should she compel her to plead, as in our text, for permission to go with her? "Intreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee." How affecting is such an appeal from the youthful traveler! And Naomi surely felt it, and was now satisfied that she had brought out the real choice of her heart. She found that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, and she ceased to try her more.

I would have you always remember that the most permanently comforting ministry is not that which deals the most superficially, but that which the most thoroughly searches and instructs the heart. "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." "Prove your own selves." "Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another." He will always carry his own evidences within

himself, in his own experience. He will have the witness in himself. You need not desire or seek for trials. Still less need you invent them and prepare them for yourself as penances and punishments. This is the darkness and wilfulness of superstition. The trial of your faith will come when God sees best, and in the way that he sees best. But you need never fear the hour of trial of divine appointment when it comes. Be really faithful and sincere, and God will prove your faith, to strengthen, settle, and stablsh you for ever. Be truly gold, and then the refiner's fire will only purify and make you bright. It can not destroy. Be sure that the blood of the Lamb is really sprinkled upon the door of your conscience and heart ; that you have with a sincere choice put yourself by faith in the Saviour's word and power, under the protection of his grace and promise, and the destroyer will pass over you. The night of Egypt's darkness shall be light to you.

This faithful decision Ruth was obliged to

make in the face of backsliding in others. She sees Orpah go back, yet she perseveres. The same arguments which were sufficient to persuade Orpah to remain in Moab might be supposed adequate to move her also. But she goes with Naomi, notwithstanding this example. The observation of this unfaithfulness in others is a great trial of faith. There will always be backsliders among those who profess to seek the Lord. The Apostles found it so. "Ye did run well," says Paul to the Galatians; "what did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." The inconsistencies of false professors, with their Christian avowal, is a great burden to the young disciple. If we are faithful amidst their unfaithfulness, our course becomes still the more difficult, and the more beset with obstacles. The course which they adopt seems to mark us as unnecessarily peculiar. It tends to unsettle our own confidence in the principles which we

have been taught. It provokes still more hostility against us. It compels us to bear unnecessary distress in our pity for them. It loads us with sorrows which the direct service of our Master does not impose. It obliges us to appear still more separate from others, and cuts off much of the apparent influence which might be exercised by our religion. It has the tendency to make us selfish and exclusive ; to drive us away from social intercourse ; and to make us solitary in our spirit and in our habits.

But such defections will always occur. They serve to manifest the fidelity of the real children of God. They increase the courage and the watchfulness of the people of Christ. They drive the true disciple to more earnest prayer, and more unshrinking determination in all things to be found faithful. How open and manifest these surrounding failures make the difference to appear between the true and the false professor ! When a child of the world comes out on the side of Christ,

and pursues, in the midst of the evil examples of many, a course of simple, faithful devotion to the Saviour, how it honors his truth ! How it strengthens his cause ! How it impresses even those who oppose ! How such faithfulness is owned and prospered by the Lord, to whom it is offered, in the usefulness to others of the life which is adorned by it.

Well do I remember a dear child like this, whose history comes to my mind as a striking illustration. She came under my ministry in the early morning of her youth, one of a family in which there were yet none who received or obeyed the Saviour's word. Beautiful in her person—lovely in her character—animated and commanding in her intellect, she was a child of peculiar attractions. But yet she was without Christ. The Holy Spirit awakened and taught her, and led her to an open and faithful stand for the Saviour in the family to which she belonged. She made her religious profession at the table of the Lord. At once the divine influence attended upon her

youthful ministrations. She became a Sunday-school teacher. The Lord honored and blessed her with remarkable usefulness there. She entered a family of wealth and fashion as a private teacher. Though scarce a woman, but seventeen years of age, her holiness of character, and faithful Christian course won upon them all, and she became the spiritual teacher and religious guide of the house, loved, venerated by old and young. She united herself to the choir of the church. Her religion was made there a blessing, and more than one who knew her nowhere else, was given to her as a seal of her ministry there. When her own religious stand was taken, her family scoffed at her course. She was compelled to bear very peculiar persecutions and hostility. Yet three sisters she brought successively to me, who traced their religious character to her example and exhortations. Attractive to our young men, they contended for the pleasure of attending her. Yet to all, on every possible occasion, she brought in

their walks or visits the important claims of personal religion. And more than one of these acknowledged, in his subsequent conversion, his first religious impressions to have been the result of her conversations. I have no doubt I might have traced twenty-five conversions directly to her influence. She died at the age of twenty-two. Lovely in her religion. Never to be forgotten by those who knew her. I stood at the head of her coffin, and addressed the assembly upon "the beloved Persis who labored much in the Lord." Dear, dear child of God,—how precious is her memory to me still! How beautiful, how effective was the religious course which she pursued! What a privilege to a pastor are such seals to his ministry in the Lord! This is the influence and the worth of that true decision which, in the very midst of the inconsistencies, and backslidings, and hostility of others, stands firmly on the Saviour's side, and chooses always the path which his life-giving truth points out.

But Ruth's choice must be made in the midst of many temptations. All the circumstances which we have considered make an array of temptations for her of great strength. Solitary, away from her former friends, with new and increasing trials of her faith, in the face of the backsliding example of her sister, her temptations to yield were many. It is hard, at the best, to maintain the power and spirit of true religion in the heart. When every thing is in our favor around us, our own hearts will still give us contest and trouble enough. Many young Christians hardly know these outward difficulties. Parental piety and guardianship are on their side. Every thing around them in their family relations favors their religious course. Their home encourages it. Domestic prayer and example sustain it. They are shielded from much that is powerfully evil in the world around. Their difficulties are all within themselves. These, indeed, they find numerous and painful enough.

But when to these are added the trials of outward hostility—the temptations of a worldly family—the direct and constant efforts of others, who ought to guard and guide them, to undermine their principles, to bewilder their judgments, and to lead their appetites and affections to sin—a scornful hostility in their nearest friends—ah, is it wonderful that they should groan in anguish under the burden which is thus thrown upon them? Yet in the midst of all these, the Holy Spirit can enable you to be steadfast and useful. If you really love the Saviour, he will seem to you worth the endurance of all hostility for his sake. The more you bear for him the happier will you be in him. Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and he will shield you in the hour of temptation, and defend you in the day of trial.

Your temptations will arise from your own tastes and habits, and from the provisions which there are in the world around to fur-

nish the gratification for them. In a city like that in which our lot is cast, there is every provision for "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Nothing but the most faithful decision will enable our young Christians to maintain a consistent course, and to adorn the Gospel with a becoming conversation. Here is one who has a delicate ear for music, and a great love for its more intricate and scientific harmony. It is a great gift. But it is also a great snare. It was bestowed to honor God and to enjoy his praise. But the enemy easily prepares a temptation suited to ensnare and pervert it. And the argument for the importance of its perfect cultivation is always at hand to cover the gratification. Here is the theatrical opera. All its agencies, attendants and influence are the agencies, attendants and influence of the theatrical drama. The single point of distinction is the vehicle of expression. But if love for music may be gratified at the opera, why may not love for

eloquence be indulged at the theater? Yet I have known young Christians who can be tempted to taste the gratification, even at this cost, and sanction by their presence a system of worldly pleasure which excludes God, opposes God, blasphemes God, because its music is fine, and they think that they at least can enjoy it with impunity. But if the glorious Lord whom they profess to serve should stand in the midst of that pleasure-seeking throng, would they spring forth to meet him, crying, like Mary at the sepulcher, "Rabboni, my master?" Nay, would they not shrink back from his gaze, and wish he had called them from some scene at least where they could behold him without shame? Ah, rather would I my child had been deaf to every sound, than be thus ensnared in sinful indulgence by the songs of syrens, in the palace of Satan!

Here is another of peculiar personal grace. She dances beautifully. Her foolish parents and friends are proud of a physical elasticity

in which every monkey and mountebank transcends her. She becomes herself vain of that which is deemed a graceful accomplishment. The daughter of the Lord Almighty, whose body and spirit have been bought with the price of a Saviour's blood, for his glory, stoops to a competition with the heathen dancing-girls of Hindostan or China. Beautiful and attractive indeed is graceful carriage and form in the young. What can be more outwardly lovely to the eye of man? But ah, when it becomes thus a snare to destroy the soul, and God the Saviour is sacrificed and banished for the wildness of a polluting, degrading whirl in giddy frivolity—I would rather my child had been given to me a cripple from her birth than see her entangled in such a snare!

Here is one whose social powers are commanding. Her conversation is brilliant and attractive. Her education has been polished, fertile, and most availing. This is a high and valued bestowment. Her tongue may

be her glory. Thus David says, "Awake up my glory." Her conversation, sanctified with the salt of grace, may lead many to Christ, and bring abounding happiness to herself. But ah ! when I see her ensnared by love for company, and the power to adorn society, into an unceasing round of daily and nightly engagements abroad ; and all serious thought and feeling, and habit, sacrificed to this passion for social life ; home forsaken, and family affection and happiness sold for the love of the foreign glitter and excitement of the "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God ;" I can not be deluded by the animating show. No kaleidoscope like this can compensate for glory lost, for heaven cast away.

I might enumerate still more temptations which press around our Ruths in the circumstances in which their decision for the Lord is to be made. You will never find the adapted trial far from you. The prince with the power of the air will be found to follow you every where with suitable enticements. But there

is no temptation from which there is not an appointed and adequate way for escape. Be faithful and you will be protected and safe. Be faithful and you will be useful and happy. Be faithful and you will be accepted and crowned with glory. Whatever may be your temptations, let me entreat you to stand with Ruth, in a simple, unshrinking determination to follow the Lord fully wherever he shall lead you, and to cast in your lot with cheerfulness and gratitude among his people, as consistent and permanent members of the family and household of God. Thus will your path be as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

VII.

The Faithful Choice.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.—RUTH, i. 16-18.

WHAT important results habitually flow from the most unimportant and unnoticed springs in the character and condition of the young! You may stand at the water-shed of some mountain-ridge, perhaps, and bathe your hands in two contiguous streams that steal along in their unmarked course to opposite sides of an immense continent. You may there, perhaps, see two kindred drops fall from the same tree, severally upon the

waters of each. They will pursue their separate widening course, until one has reached the tropical ocean through the Mississippi, and the other the Polar Sea, by the St. Lawrence. Their separation has been final. Never will they meet again.

So contiguous and so connected are often the young, in the time of their choice for life, their choice for eternity. Like kindred drops of equal purity and lustre, clinging to the same branch, two sisters may be side by side, agitated and trembling under the same influence. The moment presses on when they must separate and fall. To remain suspended, unexhaled there, is impossible. They *must* fall. But where? Will they gently drop together into the stream of holiness and love which flows from the throne of God and the Lamb, sparkling and animated, onward to the blissfulness, blessedness, and purity of life eternal? Or shall they be parted by some rough outward wind which shall hurl one of them into the rapid, heavy stream

of disobedience, darkness, and everlasting death? How much depends upon that question! How much depends upon the single moment that will decide it! What influence of untold importance is lodged in the last, final agency of determination? None but God can discern and disclose the future. Angels and saints may stand, just as we stand, and watch the tears, the excitement, the deep concern of these awakened children of earth, and ask, with still deeper solemnity, as the hour of inevitable decision draws near, Will they go with Christ? Will they choose the heavenly part? Will they grasp a Saviour's mercy? Will they embrace a Saviour's love? Will they journey with the people of God through grace to glory? Or will they grieve the Holy Spirit? Will they reject the Comforter? Will they cling to the world? Will they yield to the tempter's power? Will they join the scoffing, shouting troop of those who know not, and who

love not God? It is an issue and a moment of fearful consequence.

You may now go forward, and start from the eternity which the children of God and the children of the evil one have severally attained, and trace back these two drops of morning dew through all the intermediate circumstances and history of their journey on the bosom of the current with which they have been mingled, till you find them again glittering side by side, on the same branch, in all the beauty of their youthful day. At no point on their diverging journey were they likely to mingle into one again. Each day made their separation more hopeless and more entire. With what feeling of the importance of their early morning choice do you contemplate them now! How immense appears the responsibility and the result of their decision! How just and valued seems the earnestness which would persuade them both freely to give themselves to the Saviour's

call, and to unite with him in an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten !

Thus Ruth and Orpah hung trembling and glistening together by Naomi's side. The hour of their decision came. It was the hour of their separation for ever. This decision, important as it was, was at last a moment—a thought—a single word—"I will, I will not"—a conversion—a refusal of conversion—a choice—a separation, though they were yet together—a single step apart—and then a progressive journey, which carried each of them forward, with no return. It is habitually so. And the history of the young around the Christian Church is but a multiplying lens which gives us Ruths and Orpahs in every generation and in every land. But we come now to consider simply Ruth's faithful choice. "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee ; for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God ; where thou

diest will I die, and there will I be buried ; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." How many hearts have been moved, and how many eyes have dropped the involuntary tear over this beautiful illustration of youthful fidelity and loveliness ! The dear child of grace seems to be living here before us. We hear her gentle filial voice, as she pleads her permission to go with Naomi among the people of the living God. Her faithful choice remains a permanent, an everlasting pattern to all who hear the Gospel in their youth, in every age of the Church of God. Let us consider it.

It was an humble choice. She has nothing to offer but herself. She affects not to bring any thing which can make her of any worth. A poor, wandering daughter of Moab, she asks to be allowed to go, if it be only as a beggar, and share with Naomi the lot which might be prepared for her. She has no claim to present. She fears she may be a burden and unwelcome. She pleads only for permission

to be to Naomi in her future life all that affection and fidelity can make her. She has nothing else to offer.

How beautiful is this illustration ! It matters not in what condition of life the child of earth was born, when the Holy Spirit brings her heart to Jesus, she comes as a beggar. Her own sinfulness has been made to appear. The secret follies and willfulness of her life and temper arise to her view. The very life of ingratitude and carelessness which appeared to have no guilt in her eyes, or in the eyes of others, now seems marked with wicked neglect of God in every step. It is not what she has done that grieves her, as what she has been. Not a stain of outward wrong may have marked her course in the view of those who knew her best. Parents and sisters may say she has been always the light and comfort of the household. They are ready to think she has never sinned. And yet she feels the burden of guilt, and weeps, and prays over the remembrance of her foolish, wasted life.

The preciousness of the faithful saying, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, is her only comfort. The assurance that the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost, is her single encouragement and support. Did he ask one deed of excellence, she could not produce it. Should he demand a single hour without sin, she feels that she would search for it in vain. She has not a single provision for the journey which she desires to undertake. "No," she says ; "I stand here a beggar, on the boundary of Immanuel's land. As a beggar, will he receive me ? Will he suffer me to come to him with nothing ? In all the rags of my own corrupt and wasted nature ? Lord, I perish. Do not cast me off. Refuse not my humble entreaty and plea." But in all this conscious unworthiness, she chooses Christ as her portion and Lord. Yes, with her whole heart. If he will accept her, receive her, own her, permit her to go with him just as she is, then most gladly will she cast her lot with his, and from this

day be for him all that she can be made through the riches of his grace. Like Ruth, she humbly pleads, "Entreat me not to leave thee." Suffer me to go with thee, and partake with thy people the inheritance which thou hast provided for them.

It was an affectionate choice. When did real love ever speak from the heart more truly and manifestly than in her? It was personal, tender affection for Naomi. For her and with her Ruth was willing to do, or to be, any thing that God should appoint. What tender individuality is there in her appeal! "Entreat me not to leave *thee*." She can leave Moab without regret. She can part with her earthly friends without sorrow, gladly as she would have them go with her. But she can not leave Naomi. She will not be enticed away, or driven back from Judah. Her heart is with Naomi. Her desires all reach forward to the land to which Naomi journeys, and thither, on whatever terms, she must and she will go.

It is just such a choice to which the Saviour would lead you all. "My daughter, give me thy heart," is his tender appeal to you. And our youthful, spiritual traveler freely and affectionately responds, "I give my heart to thee ; thy face will I seek ; hide not thy face from me." This is her own affectionate choice. It is not the stand of duty merely, of obligation, of fear, of necessity. It is not the mere remedy and recourse of disappointment and weariness. It is not the constrained denial of self, of appetite, and loved indulgence. It is not an involuntary, sorrowful relinquishment of a world that was loved as long as it bloomed, and has been forsaken only because it has faded. No. The world was never brighter, happier, or more promising to her than it now is. It is not the loss of the past which she would supply. It is the perception of something infinitely more precious, which she would attain. Her choice is of the Saviour, because she really loves him. Infinite attractions are gathered around him.

His service seems to her all that she can desire. Fellowship with Christ, union with him, appears before her as the supreme blessedness of her possible condition. Could she be only always with him, and for ever like him, she would desire nothing beside.

She has no excellence in herself; nothing but sin. She feels that she has no sacrifice to make in yielding to his will. Yet she comes to him with entire and affectionate freedom of choice. She selects him as her everlasting friend, whatever may be the lot which he shall appoint for her. Her grateful heart declares, as she sits down at his feet, "Here will I dwell, and this shall be my heritage for ever, for it is the very joy of my heart." The blessedness of complete forgiveness which he bestows—the privilege of perfect peace with him—of joyful hope in him, of living, and even suffering for him, seems to her to be clothed with unspeakable attractions. And as freely as the falling drop mingles with the current in which it floats, does

her affectionate heart embrace the Saviour, and resolve to go with him. This is no fancy or enthusiasm. It is the conscious, undeniable state of the young Christian's heart. She could not say with truth that she has any other choice, or any hesitation in making this. The attractions of Moab are nothing. The fears of the journey she undertakes are nothing. Her heart is fixed, and she will never reconsider or reverse the decision it has made.

A faithful child of God, like Ruth, thus spoke to me, in a note written at this crisis of her life: "I now write to tell you that I do not hesitate, do not doubt, do not despond, do not fear. I have made a decided, deliberate choice of the Saviour for my portion, and am determined to serve him faithfully and affectionately, and to be guided by him alone. And I would express my deep gratitude for the encouragement you gave me, and for the peace of mind your words have imparted—a peace which I had almost feared would never

more be mine." Such was Ruth's affectionate choice. Such an affectionate choice of the Lord for your God would I urge you all to make.

Ruth's choice was an entire one. There was no hesitation in her mind about the decision she should make. She manifested no remaining love for Moab, and no lingering desire to carry something of Moab with her. There seemed but one side of the question as it was presented to her mind. The contrasted claim was nothing. Without the least reservation, with no conditions or terms upon which she should consent to yield—she freely gave herself up to Naomi's direction and plans. "Whither thou goest I will go : where thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God."

"Tell me not of gain or loss,
Ease, enjoyment, pomp, or power,
Welcome, poverty and cross,
Shame, reproach, affliction's hour."

This was her simple, single stand. And it was this entire choice which made the happi-

ness of her future course. She made the exchange, the transfer of herself, freely, completely, and without reserve. And there was nothing left to turn her back to Moab in her possible experience hereafter.

When the choice of a Saviour is thus entire, how completely it opens the way for future duty ! How it settles all future discussions and difficulties with a single decision ! " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? " said the awakened Saul, as he lay prostrate at the Saviour's feet. And what a question it was ! I am ready to do any thing, to be any thing, to bear any thing for thee, which thou shalt appoint, or to which thou shalt please to lead me. Show me what I have to do. The Saviour's answer, through Ananias, was, " I will show him how great things he must suffer for my sake. " The secret of happiness in religion is just here. Making it the entire, single choice of the heart. Paul afterward could say, " This one thing I do. " My mind, my thoughts, my desires, my efforts, are all

devoted to this single object. I "forget the things which are behind. I reach forward to the things which are before. I press toward the mark, for the prize of my high calling in Christ Jesus." The troubles and difficulties in the Saviour's service habitually arise from the vain attempt to serve two masters. Never will you be able to make your following of Christ consistent with following the world. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God." This testimony is just as true in our day as when it was first written.

The true convert makes a complete surrender of herself to the Lord. "None but Christ," is the language of her youthful heart. The service of Christ only, the favor of Christ only, the honor of Christ only, the merit and righteousness of Christ only, the presence of Christ only, is the simple, entire choice of her soul. This furnishes an answer to every temptation, a reply to every entice-

ment, a solution of every difficulty. I have given myself to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that shall never be forgotten. To whom else shall I go ? He has the words of eternal life.

"This, the God whom I adore,
This Redeemer shall be mine;
Earth can fill my soul no more,
Every idol I resign."

How simple and easy, then, becomes the path of life. There is but one will to consult, but one Lord to follow, but one master to serve, but one object to pursue. The question is never, Where will he lead me ? or What will he require of me ? He can not lead me wrong. He can make no demand which is not right, and none to which I am not already resolved simply to yield. Wherever he shall lead me, by his grace I am resolved to follow :

" ' Follow me ! ' I know thy voice,
Jesus, Lord, thy steps I see ;
Now I take thy yoke by choice,
Light's thy burden, Lord, to me."

All things must work together for good to me if I love him. I desire that his glory may be dearer to me than my life. I would count all things but loss, of no worth, for his sake.

Ah, my dear young friends, this simplicity of choice is most important for your happiness. Every thing in your prospect of comfort and success in the service of your gracious Saviour depends upon it. Let there be no reserves in your covenant with him. Make a complete gift of yourself to Jesus your Lord. Determine henceforth to have no other master but him, and to consult no other will than his. He has much for you to do that you know not yet ; and much, perhaps, for you to bear, that you would shrink from now. But his grace is sufficient for you. You can do all things if Christ shall strengthen you. And whatever you may be required to do or suffer for him, he can make to work for your salvation and your increased happiness in his service. Let it be your single, entire choice to glorify and honor him

according to his own direction and wisdom. This will be peace and blessedness for you here and for ever.

Ruth's choice was a determined choice. Lovely and gentle as she appears, and humbly and affectionately as she pleads, there was amazing dignity and firmness in her stand. While you listen to her protestation and appeal, you can not but feel that the power of Moab is finally broken. Useless will be all attempts to lead her back to its idolatry or its crimes. There is wonderful strength in this simplicity of determination. Her position, as she stands before us, amounts almost to the sublime. Her very youth and feebleness enhance the grandeur of the scene. The Christian Church has delighted to number the examples of such feeble, faithful daughters of the Lord Almighty, who out of weakness have been made strong, and have overcome by their fidelity the armies of the aliens. God the Saviour has rejoiced to perfect his praise out of the mouths of the babes

and sucklings of his heavenly family. Some of the most triumphant and remarkable deaths in the history of early martyrdom for Christ are of young and tender virgins who calmly and boldly endured every conceivable torture without a moment's faltering. "I am a Christian," was their gentle but firm reply to every solicitation to recant, until, worn out with suffering, they departed to be with Christ. You may never be called to the same sorrows. But you will be always summoned to the same decision. Jesus will always require from you the same unshrinking, determined choice.

How effective, how useful is the young Christian who carries out this determined spirit! She shines like a light in a dark place. The Church delights in her example. The worldly may deride. The carnal and giddy may scoff, and affect to ridicule and despise her. They may call her enthusiastic, fanatical, ascetic, priest-ridden. But she has only to hold on her way to wax stronger and

stronger. She stops not to listen, or to argue, or to reply. She presses on in her chosen path, without casting one longing glance behind. It is not far that this swarm of buzzing, biting insects follow her on her road. They live in that low marsh which lukewarm profession cultivates on the borders of true religion ; where the dividing line is run, where Ruth and Orpah part. They fly but a little distance from their native swamp. Be faithful and press on quickly, boldly, and you will soon leave them far behind.

While your mind is unsettled, hesitating, considering, doubting, the enemy may bewilder you much. He knows not the Lord's purposes concerning you. He hopes yet to cast down one whom the Lord has loved. His agents and agencies are crowding around you, innumerable and annoying. Your own mind is like a vessel yet upon the ocean, which may be captured, perhaps, by his power, and carried to some other port as a prize for his possession. But when you have

made an open, sincere, and determined choice of Jesus as your master—when you have freely yielded your heart to him as your Saviour—you have entered a harbor of rest. You are held by an anchor sure and steadfast. And the enemy molests you in these attacks no more. Soon worldly inducements will cease. Worldly invitations will be withheld. Worldly acquaintance will forget. And whether the sea has closed over you in death, or the harbor has received you in security, becomes to them a matter of indifference. They cease to tempt in their mere neglect of you, and unless their bitterness arises to peculiar hostility to your religion, they will not take the trouble of persecution. You are thus soon forgotten by the world, and left in comparative peace. Paul says, “I am crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto me.” That is, we have finally parted. Our reciprocal opinions of each other are of no mutual consequence. What they think of me I care not. “None of these things

move me ; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy, and testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

This walk in the path of abiding peace depends on the fidelity and determination of your early stand. Great peace have they who really love the law and will of God, and nothing shall offend them. The most unhappy persons, perhaps, on earth, as well the least influential, and the most despised, are they who thus try to please men ; either to propitiate the world from fear, or to hold on upon it from appetite. They build their cabins on the border. They determine there to live, really committed to neither party, and sacrificing none of the advantages which they imagine they may derive from both. Let me entreat you to renounce this whole lukewarm set, and move far off from the worldly territory which they inhabit. Like Ruth, make your choice of Jesus as your Lord, single, determined, final. Depend

upon his grace. Pray for his help. Lean upon his arm. And let the language of your heart ever be, "Where thou lodgest I will lodge ; whither thou goest, I will go ; where thou diest, I will die ; and there will I be buried." Let nothing separate me from thy love, and leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Ruth's choice was an instant choice. She asked no time for consideration. Her mind was made up. Her decision was settled. She staggered not in unbelief, nor wavered amidst conflicting motives. How earnestly she expressed this settled purpose ! "Entreat me not to leave thee." I am thoroughly resolved to go with thee, whatever the journey may cost me, or require of me. I have already determined every question connected with the solemn purpose and plan which I have formed. I do not, and will not again regard it as a question with whom I shall go. I am finally determined to go with thee.

There is much that is animating in the frankness and squareness of this instant decision. Why should we ever hesitate a moment in our acceptance of the Saviour's offers? Surely when the Lord sets before us life and death, a blessing and a curse, and bids us choose for ourselves which we will have, we require no time for consideration. When our minds are taught, our conscience is awakened, and our judgment convinced, then every moment's delay in accepting the pardoning mercy of the Lord, and in following the renewing guidance of his Holy Spirit, is but increased rebellion. We can not require of him further light, or information, or conviction. It has become a mere question of personal, voluntary choice. This can never be settled, but by our own personal decision and act. If it is to be settled, it must be finally, in a single moment of time. Why should that moment be delayed? Why should that frank and affectionate choice be postponed? Yet I have known young persons as well as old ones

remain for months and sometimes for years in this convinced and halting state. They would weep in bitterness over the remembrance of their sin. But they could not be persuaded to believe the divine assurance of the complete fullness of pardoning love. The simple testimonies, "I have blotted out thy transgressions ; I will no more remember thy sins ; the Lord hath put away thy sin ; the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth as from all sin ;" they could not, would not receive. And in the pride and hardness of their own hearts, they continued to refuse the gracious offers and commands of the Gospel, waiting for something more to be done for them. This is all but continued rebellion and increasing guilt. I pray you, my dear young friends, avoid it. Reject the enemy's temptation which would lead you to it. Make an instant choice. Say "When thou sayest, Seek ye my face, my heart replies, Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

I knew a gay and worldly youth, engaged

in the business and frivolities of an earthly, pleasure-seeking life ; careless of his soul, and thoughtless of God. By a Divine call he was awakened on one morning before he rose, to reflect upon his wasted, sinful life. He saw at once his guilt, his folly, his danger. Deeply impressed with the view, he did not hesitate a moment. He sprang from his bed, kneeled down upon the floor, and made an instant, solemn dedication of himself to God. He went down to his business another man. Old things had passed away. All things had become new. His heart, his tastes, his habits, his purposes were all changed. Never did he turn back from that hour. He lived to be made extensively useful in the ministry of the Gospel, by the Lord who had called him in that morning hour, and to whose voice he obediently listened as soon as it was heard. Doubts, fears, anxieties never followed him. Rarely have I known a happier course than he pursued, resulting from that instant choice of the Saviour as his Ruler and his Portion.

Why should any of you hesitate? All the arguments of truth, of interest, of duty, of happiness, are on one side. The privileges of the Gospel will not tarry your vain delay. The Holy Spirit will not wait to strive with your rebellious hesitation. Arise at once, and cast in your lot with Christ, and with his people, and enter to-day upon your final, glorious journey to a heavenly land. Never, never will you look back again with regret upon the Moab you leave. Never, never will you mourn over the choice your heart has made.

When Ruth's faithful choice was thus made, she was allowed to go on her way in peace. "When Naomi saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her." The young convert's sincerity of heart was now proved. The firmness and reality of her purpose could not be doubted. There was no necessity or reason for further examination of her motives, or further trial of her steadfastness of spirit. There she

stood, acknowledged, honored, and accepted as a chosen traveler for Immanuel's land. No further obstacle was interposed.

My young friends, you little know how much of the character and success of your whole religious life depend upon the character of your first choice. If this is simple and distinct, that will be clear, uniform, and happy. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so will you walk in him. You need have no doubts to harass, and no fears to disturb you. Your path may be a path of pleasantness and peace. Your light may shine yet more and more unto the perfect day. But if your choice be hesitating and half-hearted, so will be your whole course. Your mind will be clouded with difficulties, and your way harassed with temptations and foes. A skeptical, questioning spirit is a great infirmity, and a great affliction. Take the Word of God as infallible truth, and believe it, and live upon it. Make it your daily object to understand it more clearly, and to

gain more real enjoyment of its promises and hopes. Take the gracious Saviour as your chosen friend, your conscious and beloved friend. Let no doubt of his love be cherished—no question of his tender kindness to you ever be allowed. Go on your heavenward journey, with the constant assurance that he who hath loved you will love you to the end, and with an everlasting love. But this whole character of your Christian life will depend upon the nature of its beginning. Be sure, therefore, to start right. Make Ruth's humble, affectionate, entire, determined, instant choice of a Saviour's love, and a Saviour's service. At once embrace his promises, and rejoice to be permitted to belong to him. Thus your whole journey shall be accomplished, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit, with the same steadfast mind, and the same single, happy purpose with which he has enabled you to undertake it.

Such young Christians as these require from us but little watching. They are useful, in-

fluent, and happy—the crown and joy of the pastors to whom they have been given. We never find them among the backsliders or wanderers into the world of surrounding wickedness. We have no fears or anxieties lest they will rush into the mad idolatries and unsatisfying self-righteousness of encroaching Popery. By them the open Gospel is proclaimed. By them the Gospel is made attractive. By them the Saviour is honored. By them the souls of men are saved. They are the ones whom the Lord follows with his constant blessing. Their trumpet, neither in their voice or their example, ever gives an uncertain sound.

They are a happy, cheerful flock. The happiness of the family flows from them. They are the consolers of the mourning, the comforters of the afflicted. They are the friends and guides of the penitent, and the teachers of the ignorant. The awakened seek to them to be led to Christ. The Church rejoices in them. The world itself respects

and reveres them. Jesus loves them, and is satisfied in them. Heaven watches them with delight, and receives them with joy. And before a Father's throne they stand accepted, triumphant in Jesus their Lord, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

VIII.

The Backslider's Return.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?—RUTH, I. 19-22.

WE have now to trace the journey of Naomi and Ruth. They go to Judah and Bethlehem with very different feelings, though they travel together. To Naomi the journey is full of remembrances of the past. To Ruth it presents nothing but hopes of the future. Naomi returns with the deepest humiliation, feeling her own unworthiness, and doubting as to what may be her lot when she shall reach her old forsaken home. Ruth feels her

unworthiness, but to her there is no special reason for depression or doubt. She looks forward without fear—with that confidence in perfect love which casts out all fear. Her joy in anticipation of her new and chosen home allows no torment to interpose. Naomi is a backslider returning to a neglected and forsaken Saviour. Ruth is a young convert, rejoicing in being first brought to know and experience his truth and love. Though these two classes travel the same road, their individual emotions are very separate. We will consider them separately. And for our present subject we have before us the Backslider's Return.

But we may well ask in the beginning, What is backsliding? We use the word so frequently that it is quite important to have a distinct idea connected with it. I answer you, Backsliding is not apostasy. Apostasy is a deliberate and voluntary turning away from Christ—renouncing his service and his authority. The condition of the apostate is

the worst of all conditions. "The last state of that man is worse than the first." "It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them." "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries." We can have no hope of the apostate's return. But we can not say of any living individual that he is such an apostate—God only knowing his heart—and it is by God's own judgment that he must stand. We are to invite all, and to encourage all to turn from their sin and receive the Saviour's invitation and promises of forgiveness. But backsliding and apostasy are very different. Judas was an apostate, and he found no place for real repentance, though he mourned bitterly over his sin. Peter was a backslider, and obtained forgiveness and divine restoration, though with bitterness and grief. The Lord looked upon

Judas, and said, "Good were it for that man if he had not been born." The Lord also looked upon Peter and said, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren." How different were these two addresses ! Thus different are apostasy and backsliding.

Against backsliding the Apostle warns you when he says, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." Your Christian course is like the climbing a slippery steep. If you are careless, trifling, looking around, losing your hold of the ground which you have already attained, you will surely slip. You will slide back. You will fall. You would fall finally, and to the very bottom, if the gracious Lord did not hold you, that you perish not. You slide back from your own early profession. When you came out and separated your-

self from the world, it was to be the Lord's alone, and to walk in the world worthy of his high calling. This you promised, and from this you have fallen and slidden back. You slide back from your own early experience. How earnest and single was your heart in the Lord's service when you first entered upon it! It was drawing water with joy out of the wells of salvation. But you let this slip. And now your heart and affections are cold and dull, and hard to be awakened and aroused. You have slidden back from your first love. You slide back from the just expectations of the Church. You took the Lord's covenant upon you in their midst. They had the right to expect that your influence, and example, and efforts, would always be a light to others, a reproof to the world, an honor to Christ. But your careless walk has let this high standard slip. You have slidden back from these fair expectations. And the Church can not look upon you now without sorrow, and mortification,

and despondency. You slide back from the Saviour's just demand upon you. He had a right to look to you as wholly his. It was your own offer. Your own act of choice. You promised to serve and follow him alone. But you have slidden back from this. Jesus says, "What shall I do unto thee? Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

This is backsliding. It is the result of carelessness and unwatchfulness in your Christian course. It may be more or less. The soul may be still alive to God. Still looking to God, however feebly. You have slidden back, but not turned back. Perhaps you are still sliding back, losing ground constantly, gaining nothing. Ah, if you are not arrested and stopped, the loss will be dreadful, final. Even as it is, the loss to you is great. The Saviour's light is clouded from you. Prayer has become cold, formal, and much neglected. The Bible is not the lamp to your feet, and sweeter to your taste than

honey or the honey-comb. Grace within you is dull and smoldering, with hardly a spark of light. Your outward life is earthly, not spiritual—unsteady, unedifying. Your own heart is unhappy and without peace. Much have you already lost. Consider what you might have been if you had been faithful. See what you are because you have been unfaithful. Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die. You are not an apostate. You are not a castaway. But continued backsliding will be just as ruinous. Though you do not turn back deliberately, you may fall back never to arise. “See whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works.”

The backslider may return. Blessed, indeed, is this privilege to him. “The just falleth seven times and riseth up again.” God will not protect you from all the sorrows which your own follies and carelessness have produced. He will make your wickedness to correct you, and your backsliding to reprove you,

so that you may know and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing to have forsaken the Lord your God. The present fruits of suffering which your sins must bear, you will be obliged to gather, even though God shall graciously restore you at the last. We are not surprised when we see you fall, however we mourn over it. We well know the sadness of this sliding back from God. "There is not a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not." That you shall never slip, we can not expect. The Scriptures are full of the histories of those who, though they were really the servants of God, fell into sin. These histories are written for our admonition, that while we think we stand we may take heed lest we fall. No man can say, I have cleansed myself from mine iniquity. Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and walked with God. Yet Noah fell. Abraham was the father of the faithful. Yet Abraham fell. Lot was a righteous man, and his righteous soul was vexed from day to day

with the unlawful deeds of men. Yet Lot fell. David was beloved of God, the man after God's own heart. Yet David fell. And who that has ever professed to love the Lord, has not in many things slidden back, and come short of the mark of his high calling? We are not to be surprised or discouraged at this. You may find yourself to have wandered far. Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; but return to the Lord from whom you have wandered.

Naomi had wandered. But Naomi might return. God had not cast her away. He will never cast away those who truly love him. He calls them back again to true repentance. He heals their backslidings and loves them freely. Then, like Peter, they may strengthen their brethren. They have an experience of human infirmity which they had not before. They know the dangers and temptations which surround the Christian's path. They can comfort others with the

consolations wherewith they are comforted of God. What an encouraging thought is this to the backslider! You need not perish. You may come back. You may recover the ground you have lost. Arise at once, the Master calls you. Return, and he will heal you. He will refresh you with new manifestations of his love, his restoring mercy. If you feel a desire to come back, the desire is his gift. He thus invites and encourages you. Let nothing separate you from his offered mercy, or prevent your acceptance of his gracious invitations.

“Return, O wanderer, return,
And seek thy injured Father's face;
These new desires which in thee burn
Were kindled by redeeming grace.

“Return, O wanderer, return,
The Saviour bids thy spirit live;
Go to his feet, and grateful learn
How freely Jesus can forgive.

“Return, O wanderer, return,
And wipe away the frequent tear;
'Tis Jesus says, 'no longer mourn,'
'Tis God who bids thee cease to fear.”

But the backslider must return with total self-renunciation. Thus Naomi even renounces her right to her former name. "Call me not Naomi. Call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." They said, "Is this Naomi?" Yes, I was Naomi when I was contented and happy in the house, and among the people of God. I was Naomi when we took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company.

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill."

How foolish was I, and like a beast before him, thus to wander from his holy ways! Call me not Naomi now. I have no right to that name. All was pleasant then. But the remembrance is bitterness now. Call me Mara. Let me come back as the poorest of the poor, sorrowful, and self-condemned.

The backslider feels no claim to a former

Christian character. He has no right to return to God. God might justly have cut him off and cast him away. He could have had no ground for complaint if he had been finally rejected when he thus voluntarily disobeyed. The very permission to return is a great mercy.

“Yet, sovereign mercy calls, ‘Return,’
 Dear Lord, and may I come?
 My vile ingratitude I mourn,
 O take the wanderer home.”

He is compelled to say, call me not a Christian. I have forfeited that blessed name. Call me a sinner, the chief of sinners. But as such, suffer me to return again to God. “I am no more worthy to be called a son; make me as one of thy hired servants.” This the Holy Spirit makes him feel. All that he had gained he has foolishly thrown away. He must now come back with even deeper humiliation than if he had never come before. Deeper sense of his own need will press him down. Deeper feeling of his own degradation

will humble him. Happy would it have been had he never wandered. But that happiness he can not now feel. True, God will still love him. His Father will meet him and pardon him. He will still call him his child. "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still. I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord." But, amidst all this overflowing kindness from a pardoning God, by which God is pacified toward him for all that he hath done, he can not but remember his sin, and dare not open his mouth in self-vindication, for shame. He loathes himself in his own sight for all his iniquities. With the feeling of entire self-renunciation he would love to begin again his Christian course, and have all that has passed forgotten for ever.

The backslider must come back with conscious emptiness. He has nothing to bring; nothing to offer. Naomi says, "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home

again empty." How true is this! What can you bring back from your wanderings in Moab but the bitter remembrance of your folly? Vain is the attempt to recall the joys of those hours of pleasure for which you have given your soul. Your former peace—your happiness in a Saviour consciously beloved—your joy in the Holy Ghost, who graciously taught and led you in the heavenly way, are gone. In vain do you try to restore or renew them in your state of folly.

"Where is the blessedness you knew
When first you saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus, and his word?"

And what can the world give to compensate you for this loss? Your Christian character, your religious influence over others, and their confidence in the firm fidelity of your religious purposes, are all gone. Vain will be your effort to renew them, but in the sure and manifest renewal of your own Christian life. Who will willingly anchor upon

a floating island ? The fickle backslider can do no good, except as a warning monument to others. Your own free confidence in God as your heavenly Father, your filial, frank, and affectionate spirit in your relations to him, are gone. How painfully you feel this in your private attempts to pray ! How often God seems to be far from you ! How often will your burdened spirit cry out like Job, "Oh that I knew where I might find him ! That I might come even to his seat ! Behold I go forward, but he is not there ; and backward, but I can not perceive him ; on the left hand where he doth work, but I can not behold him ; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I can not see him." Nothing but sadness can come from a careless backsliding from God. And so far as your own acts and conduct are concerned, you must return to him with perfect emptiness. If divine grace and long-suffering shall receive you—if the Holy Spirit shall consent to restore you, and lead you back to the mercy-seat, once more accepted—

it will be all as a free gift to the chief of sinners. If any improvements are asked from you, what can you say? Where is your first love, your youthful devotion, your early obedience, your prayer, your penitence, your faith, your joy in God, your delight in doing his will? Ah, how sadly have you to reply, "I have lost them all! I went out full, but the Lord hath brought me home again empty."

"In my hand no price I bring,
Simply to his cross I cling."

Yet how precious is the expression, "The Lord hath brought me back!" Yes, though I am empty, and have nothing; though I am vile in his sight, and "mine own clothes abhor me;" though I was worthy of his rejection and his wrath; yet he did not leave me in my sin, nor suffer me, unpardoned, to perish. He has brought me back to his feet, and where my sin hath abounded, his grace hath so much the more abounded. But I come back empty. Every thing has failed me except

the loving-kindness and mercy of my God. No condition can be more humbling than this. And the backslider feels this low and destitute state in which the Lord finds him as throwing him more completely upon sovereign, pardoning mercy, than he ever realized before.

"'Tis mercy, mercy I implore:
O let thy mercies move!
Thy grace is an exhaustless store,
And thou thyself art love."

The backslider must return with a deep sense of guilt. Naomi thus interprets all her sorrows. "Why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" She has not a word of excuse, or self-justification. Thus the widow of Sarepta said to Elijah, "Why hast thou come to call my sin to my remembrance by slaying my son?" Her sorrow brought her own guilt to mind. And she was made to mourn with a twofold grief. Thus the returning backslider will always

feel. The consciousness of his guilt oppresses his heart. Like a heavy load, the remembrance of his unnecessary transgressions lies upon him. How he has crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame ! How he has wounded him in the house of his friends ! What obstacles he has placed in the way of others who may be desiring to find a Saviour ! What ingratitude he has shown to Christ for all his kindness to himself ! What occasion he has given to the enemies to blaspheme ! It is vain to attempt to lessen this sense of guilt. The remembrance of it, under the heart-breaking work of the Holy Spirit, oppresses, and must oppress. Secret hours of bitterness and mourning are appointed him. Closet humiliation and weeping are in store for him. He comes back through a mournful path.

Let this work of the Holy Spirit have free course in you. Do not attempt the least justification of yourselves. Speak not, think not of any temptation that led you astray,

or of the influence of any companions, or of the want of watchfulness of any friends, or of the unfaithfulness of others in instructing and warning you, or of the example and habits of others in the social circle in which you live, as the least extenuation of your own guilt. O, no. You have no one to blame but yourself. You have been tempted, only because you were drawn away by your own lust. You have been enticed by the lusting, sinful spirit which dwells within your own heart. No circumstances can be allowed to reduce your sense of your own guilt. However your blessed Lord may have mercy upon your ignorance of unbelief, and plead for you that your spirit was often willing when your flesh was weak, you can make no such plea for yourself. Do not attempt either to cover yourself by reducing your standard of duty, or by denying that the wanderings of which you are conscious, were guilty. Ah, you may unite with those who put darkness for light, and call evil good, but you will gain nothing

by such attempts at deception. God can not be mocked. Your earthly, careless backslidings from the high calling by which you were called—whatever the giddy world may think of them, or whatever mere formal religionists around you may call them—are guilty; amidst your light and opportunities, deeply, dreadfully guilty. Nothing can blind our eyes to this. Music may be entrancing—beauty attractive—dress adorning—society mirthful and bewildering—refinement may gild it—admiration may crown you in it—your silly mind, like some charmed bird, may float around in this unreal atmosphere in circles of delusive joy—but it is all guilt. It is all ruin. The price you have paid for it all is the love, authority, and presence of your Saviour. Jesus is the sacrifice, and the world has been the god. O shun every thought of self-justification. Adopt, acquire, insist upon, a real consciousness of guilt as the only characteristic of your course. The Lord testifies against you. Be willing and

determined to testify against yourself. Come, with an humbled, broken, contrite heart, from all your wanderings in folly, and cast yourself, in deep humiliation, at a Saviour's feet—imploping pardon, but acknowledging and feeling that you deserve rejection and condemnation.

“Foul, I to the Saviour fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

Yet, while the backslider himself mourns, others rejoice over him. “It came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them; and they said, Is this Naomi?” Her friends had not forgotten her. They gather around her again with delight. All Bethlehem rejoices. Naomi's poverty and wanderings are forgotten. She has herself returned, and this is enough. The poor prodigal had hardly time to say, “Father, I have sinned,” before his father buries his voice in his own bosom, and lifts up a sound of joy which completely drowns the accents of the wanderer's grief. “Bring forth the best robe, and put it on

him ; and put a ring on his hand ; and shoes on his feet ; and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it ; and let us eat and be merry ; for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found." O how blessed is this instruction ! The penitent backslider may come to Bethlehem without fear. He may go to the fountain of the Saviour's blood, in the full assurance that it can wash him as white as snow. "All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him." The Lord will multiply his pardons. If he truly believe, and trust himself simply and penitently to the Saviour's merit, and the Saviour's love, his scarlet and crimson are like snow and wool. He has no penances to enact—no loads to bear—no periods of doubt and painful uncertainty to go through. Let him come to Christ, and it is enough. The righteousness of "God manifest in the flesh" is still his. Free salvation is still for him. Complete deliverance is still his own. As he first received Christ Jesus

the Lord, so let him now walk in him ; and he will love him freely ; he will heal all his backslidings, and will save him for his own name's sake, though his backslidings testify against him. There will be great joy at his return. The Lord rejoices—angels rejoice—saints rejoice—the Church rejoices. Oh, what a song of praise does his restoration awaken ! Heaven and earth unite to say, over the returning wanderer, “Is this Naomi ?” Is this the wanderer ? This the captive that we thought was lost ? This the giddy child that was bent to backsliding, and fled from all restraint ? This the poor sinner who has been plucked as the prey from the jaws of the lion ? Who hath begotten us these ? Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it. Shout, ye lower parts of the earth, for the Lord hath blotted out as a thick cloud their transgressions, and as a cloud, their sins. O return. Return then. Fly instantly, affectionately, to the pardoning blood of Jesus, and all is well for you for ever !

IX.

The Young Convert.

So Naomi returned, and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley-harvest.—RUTH, i. 22.

THE return of the backslider was our last theme. “So Naomi returned.” We have seen the path of humiliation and the result of blessedness and peace, as exemplified in her case. But it was happy for Naomi that she did not return alone. “Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, returned with her.” “They two went until they came to Bethlehem.” They were companions through all the journey. They participated in the happiness in which the journey resulted. They possessed together the prosperity which

was bestowed upon them in consequence of their return. Little was Naomi aware of the treasure she was bringing to Israel, or of the honor which was in store for Ruth. She says, "The Lord hath brought me back empty." And it was so, so far as she was herself concerned. But the Lord had brought back with her one whom all generations should call blessed ; one who was to be a mother of the promised Messiah, the anointed Saviour of Israel—an honor which every daughter of Israel considered the very highest in their nation. We are now to contemplate her admission to Israel. The young convert's entrance among the people of God.

We can not enter upon such a view without stopping for a moment to think of the happiness of Naomi in such a companion. How great was the privilege to her, to bring back with her own return so precious a soul to the Lord of Hosts ! One main feature of our mature Christian life is its constant succession of returns from backsliding. God is daily

graciously renewing our decays. The longer we live and walk in the path of grace the more clearly does our own sinfulness appear to us, and the deeper does it seem to be. I might say, our daily life is but a daily backsliding, and a daily effort to return. Our weekly and yearly life is but a repetition of the same experience on a larger scale. In every thing we come short of manifest and conscious duty. We should despair and perish were it not for the Lord's gracious promise, "I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from them." But the gracious power of the Holy Spirit excites and enables us to return. The Saviour still pities us and receives us. The Father still bears with us and accepts us. Happily, the most of our falls and sins are secret. Our gracious God mercifully hides our folly, protects our character, and suffers us not to be dishonored in the view of others when we have very much dishonored him. Our errors and wanderings are

often unknown to others. And we may at the same time be growing in holiness in their estimation, when we are the most deeply humbled under the consciousness of sin in ourselves.

How great is our privilege if, in our age, we find our children and our youthful friends ready to come back with us to the service of God! What an unspeakable joy it is to a Christian parent to be attended by his children in the heavenly path! What an encouragement and consolation it is to see them led by our example, ignorant of our secret humiliations; to have them come to us with confidence and affection, and freely ask the way to Zion, and faithfully avow their purpose to travel with us to the heavenly country! "So they two went together until they came to Bethlehem." I can not conceive a greater blessing in social life than when we can say this of father and son, of mother and daughter. This is a bond which must long outlast every other one; and a

treasure of enjoyment which must remain when every other one has failed. How such companionship in religion relieves the sorrows of the road ! How it multiplies the joys of the way ! Let us never forget that sympathy divides our griefs and doubles our enjoyments. It is never good for one to be alone in the path which leads to God. No blessing can be greater than such family religion. The benefit is mutual. The parent's faith is strengthened and animated by an observation of filial devotion. The child's heart is encouraged and upheld by an experience of parental fidelity. Instead of the parents are the children. They will take our place in the sanctuary. They will fill up our usefulness in the Church. They will maintain our warfare in the world. They will perpetuate our influence among men. They will honor our memory after we are gone. They will meet us crowned in glory. We shall not be ashamed when we speak with them in the heavenly gate.

The mother and the daughter take sweet counsel together on their journey. Naomi has much to tell, Ruth has much to ask, in reference to the new home to which they are returning together. The child's readiness to hear is a swift witness of the transparent sincerity and excellence of parental example. We have no witnesses of our religious conduct more scrutinizing, or generally more accurate, than the consciences of our children. However often filial love may lead to the covering or excusing our domestic faults, they form a real, and generally accurate opinion of the reality of our Christian profession. And it is a most grateful tribute from the Lord's hand, when they can freely come, and confer with us of the great interests of our common salvation. Let parents encourage this spirit of confidence. By openness, and tenderness, and reasonableness of conduct and expectation, let them strive to win the minds of youth to confiding and affectionate communication.

Their mutual prayers and encouragements are full of advantage. The blending of the varied experience of the two becomes helpful to both. The despondency of age is animated by the joyful anticipations of youth. The effervescence of youth is moderated by the experience and soberness of age. The hours of affliction are made lighter. The burden of care and trial loses half its power to oppress. Many a sorrow which would completely press down the mother alone, becomes an absolute comfort and blessing by the religious spirit and affectionate ministrations which it calls forth in the child. And Naomi finds a happiness in the society of Ruth which she hardly hoped to find again upon the earth. "*So they went together.*" Unity of feeling, unity of interests, unity of hope bind them together. They have fellowship one with another. They separate not in the whole course of the journey. They came together to Bethlehem. They enter the land, the people, the house of the Lord together. What greater

comfort can there be to declining age than the presence and ministrations of religious youth? What a solace is it to a dying parent's heart to breathe his last in the midst of filial gratitude and piety! To close his eyes upon earth with their last vision upon a family whom he hath trained for Christ—whom the Lord has really called to his service—and who survive him on the earth to perpetuate the memory of his love, and the influence of his character, to the glory of their common Father and Lord! Well does the Apostle say, "Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise," full of blessings in its religious observance, both to the parents and to the children.

But while Ruth took sweet counsel with Naomi, her thoughts and feelings were still in a great degree peculiar to herself, and completely her own. To her every prospect is hopeful, and her imagination loves to stray through all the anticipations which are pre-

sented to her youthful mind. Nothing appears discouraging to her, in the views which she indulges. This is a blessed privilege of youthful piety. It gives ample, delightful employment to the divinely-bestowed powers of imagination. What we call castle building, in connection with our possible earthly affairs, that is, anticipations and schemes which are wholly fanciful, and never likely to be realized, is no longer building castles in the air when we are guided by the hopes and promises which the Gospel brings. Here we may anticipate with assurance, and roam with unchecked delight. Heaven is eternal youth ; an eternal succession of anticipations and hopes. The young Christian truly living and walking in Christ, rejoices in the hopes which a Saviour gives ; is encouraged, ardent, and delighted in looking forward over the way in which the great Captain of salvation is leading the sons of God. The happiness of true piety is habitually the commanding feeling of such a heart. Often has such a one said

to me, "I can not sympathize with some of your statements of the trials of religion. The path seems to me to be filled with joys. I see no trials or sorrows in it." Thus would Ruth have said. She could have no feeling but unmingled pleasure in the prospect of the journey she had undertaken.

Every step of this journey is new. And her hourly experience is as encouraging as her anticipations. Prospects and scenes are constantly opening upon our heavenly road which were before unknown. There is nothing stale or unexciting in a youthful religious life. Every day brings new experience of a Saviour's love—new enjoyment of the teaching of the Spirit—new opportunities to do something for Christ—new intelligence of the testimonies of his word—new pleasure in the offerings of worship to him—and new readiness to endure and suffer for his sake. When the mind has been enlightened with clear views of the Saviour's truth, and his pardoning love and justifying righteousness are seen

and embraced with a ready and thankful faith, then the path of obedience seems ever open, and ever plain. The obstacles are few, and are disregarded. The trials are small, and furnish no subject for complaint. The privilege of the Lord's service seems great and precious. And each day prepares some pleasure for the soul that has thus been taught to love him, which was not seen or felt before.

Delightful encouragements arise in her mind which overwhelm all possible regrets or fears. How many hopes and plans cluster around Bethlehem and Judah! She knows not what the Lord has prepared for her. It has not entered into her youthful heart to conceive the actual blessings which are laid up in store for her there. But she knows that all must be well and happy for her under the shadow of his wings in whom she has come to put her trust. Well may you appropriate all this, my young Christian friends. "Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?" What encouraging hopes

crowd to animate your youth in the service of your Lord ! How useful to others you may become ! Many may be waiting to hear the word of God from your mouth. Many souls may be prepared to be given as seals to your ministry, and your example. Little can you imagine to what an extent this may be ! God has laid open to you a path of unlimited usefulness on earth. I mean unlimited by any bounds which we have a right to fix. He only could describe it to you. Arise, and take advantage of it. Make full proof of the privileges he bestows, and be eager and determined to fill up the measure of your dispensation from him. Come, give your life and strength freely and simply to the glory of your crucified Lord. “Thine are we, David. And on thy side, thou son of Jesse. Peace be unto thee. And peace be to thine helpers. For thy God helpeth thee.” Nothing is in your way. You may do all things through Christ that strengtheneth you, and be made more than conquerors in him.

She comes with a deep sense of her own unworthiness. But this is silenced by her conscious desire and choice. The young convert knows and feels his guilt. But he need not, and does not stop to sit down under the mere dominion of grief for the past. He has his new work to do. He must press forward in it. And the cloud will pass away, and leave him in the sunshine of his Saviour's love, to finish and perfect it. He sees complete forgiveness in the blood of his gracious Lord. He hears of perfect acceptance in the merit of the Master whom he now serves. With nothing of his own but guilt, he yet can come freely and with confidence to the fountain which Christ has opened, and be at peace. And at the same time he can feel and say, "I am nothing, less than nothing; yet I have all, and abound in Christ. All things are mine, because I am his." Thus, my dear youth, look to Jesus. Cast your burdens and cares at his feet. Leave them there, and set out upon the path of new obedience and new

duty under the shelter and guidance of your new Master, who will be more than all to you.

But the perseverance of Ruth furnishes us with another most important example. "They went together until they came to Bethlehem." There is no fact which gives the Church more peculiar joy in the coming of young converts to Christ than their habitual perseverance. They are the ones who "hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end." Those "who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age. They shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright, and there is no unrighteousness in him." What is thus the Lord's promise is also the constant experience of his Church. Who are they that go forth to preach the Gospel? To plant the truth of Jesus in heathen lands? Who are they that labor to teach, and guide, and bless the

young? Who are they that honor the Lord with their substance, and the first fruits of their increase? Who are they that are valiant for his Word, and maintain the honor of his law? These are all the young converts to the Saviour. They can be useful, fruitful, honorable for him. They can be increasingly happy in themselves. He loves those who early love and seek him. And our habitual experience is, that the multitude of backsliders and false professors are not generally found among them. We see them holding on their way, and waxing stronger and stronger even to the end. They have the blessed privilege of saying, "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth. And hitherto I have declared thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." The most fruitful, faithful Christians are habitually those who begin the earliest. I would earnestly press upon you a remem-

brance of this truth ; and entreat you to set out now—to-day—in the morning hour—in simple dedication of yourselves to the Lord, and with a fixed determination never to withhold your hand from his work till the evening come ;

“Till in life's latest hour you bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”

The time of Ruth's arrival at Bethlehem was most significant. “They came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley-harvest.” The barley-harvest of Palestine was in the early spring. The barley was sown after the autumnal rains, in the month of October, and the harvest was in the month of April. It was a time of special joy, the first spring-gathering of their annual fruits. The harvest is always employed as an illustration of satisfaction and joy. “They joy before thee, according to the joy of harvest.” And is it not always a scene of rejoicing when the sinner returns ? When backsliders come

again to their first love, and new trophies of the Saviour's power are brought to his sanctuary—there is abounding joy. The master and the reapers rejoice together over the products of the field which the Lord hath blessed. The husbandman casts his seed in the ground. Thus do we scatter the seed of the Saviour's word upon the minds and hearts of men. And when the Holy Spirit gives life and growth to the heavenly seed, and it springs and grows up, and bears its fruit unto life eternal, in a harvest of converted souls, happy is the pastor who has toiled and waited. Happy is the church which is thus refreshed. Happy they who are returning with their streams of joyful hope. He that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together.

The harvest was a time of opening abundance. No wants or poverty were pressing now. There is thus bread enough and to spare in the Saviour's house. And when the sinner finds a shelter there, he finds all his

needs supplied. His soul has abundance of all things which it desireth.

“Every longing satisfied
With full salvation blessed.”

No more encouraging time could there have been for Ruth's first acquaintance with Israel. Every aspect of the land was promising and prosperous. The fields glowed around in their beauty. The sounds of joy arose on every side. The sight of plenty crowned every prospect. And she sees her new home clothed with every attraction. Like the Queen of Sheba, she is ready to say, “The half was not told me.” Is it not always so when we first come to the feet of Jesus, and find our peace and acceptance there? Now we seem to live for the first time. There is reality, happiness, satisfaction here. We are no longer ashamed of our pursuit. We no longer desire to roam in the wilderness of earthly folly. We have found him whom our soul loveth, and we have found every thing we want in him.

The barley-harvest was the time of the passover. The weeks between the passover and the pentecost they "began to number from the time they put the sickle in the corn." The beginning of the barley-harvest was the bringing the first-fruits, a sheaf of their barley, to present it before the Lord. And when the seven weeks which were to be numbered were completed, two loaves of their new bread must be brought as another first-fruits to present in his sanctuary—the token of their harvest now complete. Thus this young convert from the Gentiles comes as the first-fruits of a Gentile harvest to be gathered, and is welcomed with Israel as a partaker of the paschal feast. Happy are we in welcoming our youthful friends giving evidence of their new-birth for God, and their living faith in Jesus, to the table of the Lord. Happy is the house, the first-fruits of which are thus consecrated and sanctified by the Spirit to be the Lord's for ever. Happy is the church where youthful members flock

around the Saviour's board, delighting to say to him, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth."

The Saviour was the first-fruits of the resurrection. He ascended to present himself before the Father's throne—entering as our forerunner within the vail. The loaves of the completed harvest will be presented when "he has accomplished the number of his elect," and brought out his everlasting glorious kingdom. Then shall all his grain be gathered to his garner, and the chaff destroyed in unquenchable fire. Ah, when that great day shall come, then will Ruth appear with him in glory. The great harvest finished, and all his saints with him for ever. My dear young friends, shall you be there? Has the Saviour had the first sheaf of your youth? May he hope to have the loaves of your maturity? O seek now the harvest of his Spirit's work within you. Thus in that great day may you partake the joy of the Saviour's harvest in the multitude of his redeemed.

X.

The Rich Kinsman.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.—RUTH, ii. 1.

THERE have already passed before our view the wanderers in the folly and suffering of their flight from God; the backslider in her awakening from sin, and her penitent return to find again the mercy she had cast away; and the youthful convert in her first rescue from guilt, her faithful choice of the service of God, and her happy entrance among his people. A new scene opens to us now. The lovely character of Ruth is connected with the majestic revelation of Ruth's Redeemer. This presents to us the main object of the

whole history, which is not merely an exhibition of Ruth's character, but also an illustration of her complete redemption.

The law of God provided for every wasted and impoverished Israelite a particular kinsman, whose duty it was to bear the responsibilities of his redemption. This was to be the nearest kinsman who had the ability to accomplish the redemption which was required. And though Boaz was not the nearest kinsman to Naomi, yet the one who was nearer in his relation had not the ability to redeem her, and Boaz became their appointed and sufficient redeemer.

The title which the law gave to this designated kinsman was GOEL, meaning one who redeems, the kinsman-redeemer. There could be but one such. The legal appointment gave him very peculiar rights, and laid upon him very particular obligations. We may with profit first cite the language of the legal institution. "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are

strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it, then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it, until the year of jubilee ; and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession. And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family ; after that he is sold he may be redeemed again ; one of his brethren may redeem him ; either his

uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him ; or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him ; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him, from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubilee ; and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubilee, both he and his children with him."—Leviticus, xxv.

“ Speak unto the children of Israel, when a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done ; and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass

unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the Lord."—Numbers, v. 6.

Here the various duties and rights of the goel, the kinsman-redeemer, are described. Four different things he was to do. He was to redeem the property which the impoverished family had sold. He was to redeem the persons of his poor relations from bondage. He was to make satisfaction for the loss which others had endured by the poverty of his relative. He was to receive satisfaction for injuries which had been done to his kinsman. These were his responsibilities and his rights. In all these things the goel was in the actual place of his impoverished relative. He was his appointed representative. What was done by him or to him, in this legal relation, was as if it were done by or to the person himself for whom he appeared. Just such a goel Naomi and Ruth found in Boaz. God had provided a rich kinsman for them, who was perfectly able, and entirely willing to redeem their property, and to restore

to them their condition in Israel. And the residue of the story is occupied in a description of the way in which he actually accomplished this redemption.

But this whole appointment of the goel was intended to be a very clear and beautiful type of our gracious Saviour, who has become our kinsman, that he might be our Redeemer. And the history of the actual instance of redemption which the story of Ruth gives, is as clear an illustration of that wonderful work of redemption which Jesus has accomplished, and which the goel typified. He assumed our nature, and took a body of the same earthly origin as our own, with all its powers and properties—with all the compassions, sorrows, and feelings of man, that he might redeem us from our poverty and condemnation, and restore to us the inheritance and the station in the family of God which we had lost. By this very name GOEL, is he habitually called in those places of the Old Testament which speak of him as our Redeemer.

I may select a few instances of this for you.

Job says, ch. xix. 25, 26, "I know that my Redeemer (my goel) liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and though, after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God," (or I shall see God in my flesh, as incarnate for me) "whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." This was his glorious testimony of a belief in the future manifestation of the Saviour in human flesh—and the certainty of his hope that he should see him in a glorified body, a man like himself. Well does he long that such precious words were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever ! God has thus become our kinsman, our goel in our own flesh. "The union in Immanuel's person of God's nature with man's, is like a ladder which reacheth from the earth to heaven. At one end it descends into the lowest depths of the horrible pit, and at the other it rises into the heights

of uncreated blessedness and glory." "Contemplate with the telescopic eye of faith, your fellow man, your nearest of kin, your brother according to the flesh, the native of Bethlehem, a town which your tourists visit, the Son of a woman whose grave is among us to this day. Behold him clothed with the robes of divine majesty, and, as the peer and colleague of God the Father, swaying on the throne of eternal monarchy, his scepter over all that is created in heaven, earth, and hell; Immanuel, God our kinsman." (*Hewitson*.) This is our goel, our rightful, appointed Redeemer.

Psalm xix. 14. David says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer." (My goel.)

Proverbs, xxiii. 11. "Enter not into the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer (their goel) is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."

Isaiah, xlvii. 4. "As for our Redeemer (our

goel,) the LORD of Hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel."

Jeremiah, l. 34. "Their Redeemer (their goel) is strong, the Lord of Hosts is his name. He shall thoroughly plead their cause."

These are only a few of the many passages in which the Saviour is called our goel, in the language of the Old Testament. All that the appointed kinsman could do for the estate and body of his impoverished relative, the Lord Jesus as our goel does for our souls, and our everlasting state. In his humanity he is our nearest kinsman. In his Deity, he is perfectly able to supply all our wants, and to defend us from every danger and oppression. As the promised goel, the Lord Jesus has a special relation to Israel as a nation, and a particular personal relation to every believing soul. We may in a few words speak of both of these points.

He is the goel, the kinsman-Redeemer of the nation of Israel. He is the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations are to be blessed.

God gave the land of Canaan unto Abraham, and unto his seed for ever. It was to be their permanent possession. But the children of Abraham have been long since cast out of their inheritance. Their land has been taken from them, and they have been wanderers and exiles on the earth. They are not reckoned among the nations. Yet God ordained that this land should not be sold for ever, because it was his land. It was Immanuel's land. And Immanuel is their kinsman according to the flesh, who is to restore again that land to the seed of Abraham, and to put Israel again in possession of the inheritance which is theirs by an everlasting covenant, but from which they have been so long driven. His feet are in that day to stand upon the Mount of Olives. He is to be the king over all the earth. The land shall be inhabited in her place. Men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction. These are some of the divine promises concerning this land. Then the children of Israel shall

return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king. And they shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord ; and all nations shall be gathered unto it. The house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together to the land that God hath given for an inheritance unto their fathers. They shall dwell in the land wherein their fathers have dwelt, and the Son of David is to be their prince for ever. These are divine promises. (Genesis, xiii. 14. Zechariah, xiv. Hosea, iii. Jeremiah, iii. 17. Ezekiel, xxxvii. 25.) There are many promises like them. But I have not room to consider them here. The Lord Jesus is to be their kinsman-Redeemer, and to restore to Israel the land, and the liberty, and the exaltation which they have lost.

But the Lord Jesus Christ is also our goel, our kinsman-Redeemer—to fulfill the great duties of a Restorer to us. He restores that which he took not away. All that our impov-

erished, sinful nature has lost, this glorious Saviour gives us back again, to be ours for ever. He has redeemed our lost estate. He has brought life and immortality to light, and given us a kingdom which can not be moved. He sets before us an unfading and incorruptible inheritance, as a kingdom which was prepared for us before the world began, but which we have lost by sin, and sold for our own transgressions. He has redeemed our persons from bondage and condemnation. He has been made sin for us when he knew no sin. He has been made a curse in our stead, and given himself a ransom for us. Thus he has set us at liberty from the condemnation of our guilt—has freely pardoned our iniquities—and, by the shedding of his own blood, he has delivered us from the law under which we were held, and has placed us under the dominion of his grace. By becoming himself a bond-servant in our place, he has made us free, with the liberty of the children of God. He has prepared our inherit-

ance for us, and he prepares us for our inheritance, and puts us in possession of it for ever. He makes full satisfaction for all our sins. His precious blood cleanses from all sin. By one sacrifice he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. So that God can be just, and yet the justifier of all who believe in him. He has thus magnified the divine law, and made it honorable, by dying under its sentence in our place, and perfectly obeying its precepts for our salvation. He demands satisfaction in our name. The enemy and oppressor who held us in bondage he has bruised under his feet, has triumphed openly over him, and spoiled him of his prey, by plucking our souls out of his grasp, and breaking his dominion over us. Satan has no longer power to oppress those who receive Jesus as their kinsman, and have been redeemed and restored by his power. Thus Jesus is our goel. He fulfills for us every obligation which was laid upon the kinsman-redeemer of the Israelites. We may have entire confidence in his willing-

ness and his ability to restore and save us. We may go to him just as freely and hopefully as the impoverished Jew went to his kinsman, perfectly sure that he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

This gracious character of our blessed Saviour is brought out in many points of view in the history of Boaz. When Naomi returned to Judah with Ruth, she found a goel already prepared for her. He was "a mighty man of wealth," perfectly able to meet all their wants, and to restore them to their happy condition again. A kinsman already provided. And such a kinsman has been provided for us. We need not say, "Who shall ascend up to heaven to bring Christ down from above"? He is already prepared to be a Saviour for us, before we are born. His incarnation, sufferings, and death have been completed. He has made the way perfectly open for our complete salvation. We have nothing to do but to receive him, trust in him, and

obey him, as our gracious Lord. He has himself finished our salvation, and if we accept him and believe in him, we at once possess the glorious salvation which he has perfected for us. Like Boaz, he is "a mighty man of wealth." All things in heaven and earth are his. And if we are his, all things are ours. He can enrich his people with every conceivable blessing. No good thing can they want while they have him for their friend and portion. How blessed is the recollection of this fullness which dwells in our Lord ! Perfect atonement for our sins. Glorious righteousness for our acceptance. Tender sympathy for our needs and fears. The Holy Spirit without measure to be bestowed by him. Unlimited glory as the just recompense of his obedience. Everlasting security in his merit. What more can we ask ? We are full—we are rich. We reign as kings in life eternal, if we lay ourselves in simple faith at the feet of Jesus, and receive him as our kinsman and our friend. We shall find no end to his riches.

We can not trust him too entirely, or believe in him, or hope in him with too much confidence. We shall never be straitened in him. O, that I could lead you to see how clear, and open, and perfect, and sufficient is the way of salvation which he has opened for you. "Come unto me and I will give you rest." "Whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

The name of this rich kinsman of Naomi's was BOAZ, which means *strength*. In this name we may find a memorial of our divine Redeemer. Jesus is our strength and our salvation. He is the power of God unto salvation for us. What mighty works he has done for us! What works of mercy is he still willing to accomplish! What loads and burdens does he bear in our behalf! He has borne our load of guilt in triumph, and endured the condemnation which it deserved. He has met the enemy of our souls in conflict, and trodden down his power to oppress. He has burst the bars of death,

and taken possession of a throne of glory for us, as one mighty to save. He overcomes the dominion of sin in our hearts, and leads us captive by the power of his grace. He rules over all things in heaven and earth, as our Prince and Saviour, the Lord of lords, and King of kings, and makes all things work together for good to those who love him. He has promised to bring with him in his glory all whom the Father hath given to him, losing not one. He will thus triumph in us, in everlasting glory, and show himself able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto him. Thus he is our Boaz, the Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. And whether we read the law which appointed the goel, or this history, which so clearly illustrates the law, in each case we see our Lord Jesus Christ presented to us as all our salvation and all that we can desire.

He is our kinsman-redeemer. We see him in his lowly human, suffering form, wearing our nature, and bearing the burden of our

sin. We see him in the unsearchable riches of his grace as God over all, and in the triumphs of his obedience as the Lord our Righteousness, possessing unlimited wealth to be applied to our needs. We see him of infinite might, exalted above the heavens, angels, authorities, and powers being made subject unto him. We see him fully provided for us, waiting to be gracious to us, and ready to receive the poorest and the most wretched of his kinsmen who come to him. How his character and his work are adapted to attract us to himself, and to encourage us in his service! My dear young friends, flock to his feet—accept his offers—embrace his promises—consent to take him as your kinsman, and love him with grateful love in return for all his goodness and love to you.

Such a rich kinsman the aged backslider found on her return to Judah. Such a kinsman the young convert became acquainted with, and united to, when brought from Moab to the land of Israel. The history

proceeds to tell us, in various particulars, the works of kindness and love which this kinsman did for them. And as these facts come successively before us we shall see in them beautiful illustrations of the works of mercy which our blessed kinsman and brother accomplishes for us. If the Lord shall be pleased to bless us with the teaching of his Spirit, we shall see more, and learn more of a Saviour's love in every step which we take in our study of this beautiful history.

“O loved, but not enough, though dearer far
Than earth, and its most loved enjoyments are,
None duly love thee, but who, nobly free
From sense and self, lay up their all in thee!

“My soul, rest happy in this high estate,
Nor wish in earthly wealth to be esteemed great;
Receive the impression of his will divine,
Be that thy glory, and those riches thine.”

XI.

The Gleaner.

And Ruth the Moabite said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. And, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee.—RUTH, ii. 2-4.

It is not in man who walketh to direct his steps. God brings his children by ways that they know not. He makes darkness to be light before them, and crooked things straight. He does this by opening to them a gradual and successive exhibition of the plans which he has formed concerning them. These plans are all laid out and complete in his own mind. He is of one mind always.

He knows the thoughts which he thinks concerning them. But the manifestation of his plans to his people is very gradual, and as they are able to bear it. This is to us a blessed thought. There is no accident in our lives. Our ways are ordered by the Lord, and we may ever trust entirely to him that he will lead us in perfect safety. He knows the way that we take, and if we love him, when he hath tried us we shall come forth like gold.

We have seen how ample were the relief and the portion he had provided for Ruth. There was a kinsman prepared to protect, to sustain, and to exalt her, who was a mighty man of wealth. But as yet, she had no personal knowledge of him. She had no means of knowing what the gracious purposes of God regarding her might be. Just so we have seen God has prepared an all-sufficient and waiting Saviour for the sinner who is now poor and perishing; a Saviour able to meet all his wants, his

dangers, and his future needs. But the perishing sinner knows nothing of him, or of his own interest in him. Yet God leaves him not in his ignorance. He sends his Holy Spirit to show him the grace and glory which are laid up for him in Christ ; and to lead him to this gracious Lord, that believing in him he may find eternal life in him. The way in which God is pleased to lead us to Jesus we shall have opportunity to see, while we trace the method of Ruth's introduction to her rich kinsman, in whom she was to find such wealth and happiness for herself.

The first step is to reduce her to the deepest necessity. She has arrived with Naomi in Bethlehem. But they are there in great poverty, and with no apparent means of relief. Want, like an armed man, invades their lonely habitation. Her proposition to Naomi displays the pressing character of their need. It speaks the extent of their previous suffering. "Let me go

into the fields and glean ears of corn." This abrupt introduction of the request shows what had gone before. They might have meditated in silence over their extreme necessity, or they might have been conversing together on their apparently hopeless state, when the thought suddenly strikes the mind of Ruth—it is the time of harvest, and the poor and stranger go out to glean: I will go also. "Mother, let me go and glean."

The divine provision for the gleaner was most gracious. "When you reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. Thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger."—Leviticus, xix. 9. It was the provision for the destitute and the beggar. And such is their extreme want that they have no recourse but to beg. "Mother, let me go to the fields and glean."

How this very necessity brought out a proof of the excellence of Ruth! We might

have reasonably looked for the language of weariness and disappointment. We should not have been justly surprised to see her give way under a trial so heavy, or to hear her say, "Let us go back to Moab. It was better for me with my first husband than now." This would have been the feeling and the language of Orpah, if she had come so far. This is the feeling and language of many like her. The weariness of earthly disappointment makes them faint in the day of adversity. But this was not Ruth's mind. Love for her mother constrained her to seek a supply for their need. But she could not sin even to provide for her mother. The supply must be in Bethlehem, and according to the will of God. And as she looked out upon the harvest-field, and saw the poor and the stranger following the reapers, she says, "Mother, let me go to the fields and glean." And she came to the field, as a poor stranger, to gather up the scattered heads of barley which the reapers had left

in their path, and in the corners of the field. It could have been the result only of extreme necessity.

Thus God brings the soul that he has loved and saved to an experience of utter want. He makes every hope to fail, every means of spiritual safety to depart. Comforts and joys, and personal strength, and remembrance of his own virtues or goodness, all fade entirely away. The poor sinner seems left to perish. He looks round in vain for any relief. The Holy Spirit convinces him of sin, makes him to feel himself lonely and lost. He has no hope. He is in utter despair. But his conscious necessity urges him to come as a beggar, and seek the provisions of mercy in the Saviour's field. The poor woman said, "The dogs under the table eat of the crumbs which fall." Let me come under this deep humiliation and gather the crumbs. The pressure of conscious want upon the soul is great, often intolerable. The sinner cries out, "O wretched man that

I am, who shall deliver me?" But Jesus is not far off. This very pressure is his work. The sinner must be thus brought down to feel himself lost and perishing. And when the Spirit has accomplished this, it is an important and blessed step toward a full revelation of the riches of grace already prepared for him. When he can say, Let me come as a beggar, let me go to the fields and glean—I am willing to be the lowest of the low if the Saviour will receive me; ah, then, the Lord is ready to rise upon him with healing in his wings. The day of his salvation draws nigh.

The next step is to take away all feeling of rebellious pride in their state of want. This sinful pride is a most common attendant upon our earthly distress. It is the maintaining and magnifying our own claims and rights to the reverence and regard of others. It is offended with outward dishonor and want as if it were an injury inflicted upon us. Its opposite is meekness of spirit which feels our

own unworthiness, and patiently endures the reproach, or the need, and commits itself to God. This pride is very different from dignified self-respect. That is a guarding of our character and soul from the real degradation of sin. Pride will submit to any secret meanness to avoid outward exposure to the contempt of others. Self-respect will do no wrong, however secret, because God whom we love and fear, always sees. Joseph had great self-respect. He was a poor bonds slave, yet he says, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Nehemiah had great self-respect when he said, "Should such a man as I flee? I am doing a great work; I will not come down." Ruth had great self-respect, a dignity of character that would have honored any condition in life. But she had no pride that rebelled against her condition. She was not ashamed to be poor. "Let me glean after him in whose sight I shall find grace." This is a most happy and a most exemplary state of mind. She bowed down to

the gracious will of God, and was ready to receive all his mercies to her as a gift of grace. She demanded and expected nothing as a claim of merit or right. How important to you is such an example. You may all become poor, very poor. Your gracious Master had not where to lay his head. There is no dishonor in honest, patient poverty. Lazarus was fed with crumbs from the floor, on earth. But angels delighted to minister to him, and to carry him at his departure to a home of peace. Sin only is a dishonor to us. Every outward sorrow may be made an increase of our personal respectability, and really enhance the reverence which others are made to feel for us. Whatever be the trial, while we bear it with submission, and receive it from the Lord with patience, and strive to fulfill the special duties which it brings, it will be made the occasion of giving us still greater honor. Never, then, suffer the spirit of rebellious, worldly pride to arise within you, because you are poor, or suffering, or neglected. Probably

Ruth was all these. Beyond doubt she felt the keenness of the trial. Yet she lays aside all pride in her condition, and instead of saying, "Mother, will you go and glean in the fields, you can do it better than I. They will reverence you, and not treat you unkindly or with contempt;" she says, "Mother, let *me* go and glean. I am sure some one will pity and protect me. I shall find grace in the eyes of some one. God will take care of me. Let *me* go." Ah, how beautiful such a character is! No wealth can exalt it. No station can adorn it. It is itself the ornament in the sight of God of great price.

But it is thus God leads the sinful soul to its great Kinsman. His gracious plan is to give every thing freely, and to make man receive his free gifts with grateful acknowledgment that he has deserved nothing. He thus hides pride from man, and takes all the glory to himself. The sinner is made to feel his deep unworthiness—to see that he is not only destitute, but guilty. He has no right

to the least consideration or notice. If God should pass him over, and he should be permitted to glean no pardoning mercy, he could have no ground of complaint. He has not the remotest claim to any blessing. He feels that where grace abounds sin has also abounded. And though he will not sin that grace may abound, for he abhors his transgression, yet he rejoices to receive salvation as a gift, a free gift to his lost and guilty soul, a gift for which he has done nothing, and can never do any thing in the least degree to make it less free, or to make himself in any possible sense deserving of its bestowal.

Thus the sinner who would rejoice in a Saviour's love must feel. But how long do we struggle against this spirit! How hard it seems contentedly to depend on mere grace to the ungodly! This is one main obstacle in the way of our salvation. It is the last one that is ever removed. We wish either to become worthy of God's mercy, or to do something to repay it, or to have some character

or feeling in ourselves that shall seem to be a reason for it. We desire to say, "God pardons me because I have tried to obey him, or because I am sorry for my sins, or because I now love his commands—but not because I am so guilty and completely lost." Yet all this mixing up of any thing of our own as a reason for his forgiving love, is sinful pride. It may sometimes be in the assertion that we do possess it, and sometimes in the distress that we can not get it. But it is all sinful pride which can not submit simply to believe God's word, and to be saved freely by his grace, and then to rejoice in him alone. And the Holy Spirit will make us feel our own unworthiness, until we are perfectly willing to glean where we may find grace, and to receive mercy to the guilty, treading our pride for ever beneath our feet.

The next step is one of gracious providence to bring her, as it were by accident, to an unexpected introduction to her rich kinsman. Ruth is wholly ignorant of him or of the loca-

tion of his fields. She is equally ignorant of the exalted connection she is to have with him. In her deep necessity, her sincere submission, her pure and unfearing modesty, she goes out to seek a provision for her mother's wants, not knowing whither she went. To her the future of life is darkness. But God, her gracious God, in whom she trusts, is light in whom is no darkness at all. What an encouragement to us does this ignorance of hers afford ! How abounding may be God's provided mercies for us ! We may be in the very depths of necessity, in want even of our necessary food, and yet God may be working out the most extensive plans of benefit for us. Remember that his gracious plans are all completely formed before any part of them are made known to us. And we are to go forward in the plain path of duty in our present condition, and leave all the future to be arranged and revealed to us according to his will.

Ruth goes out into the harvest-field of

Judea, separated among its various owners only by the landmarks, which could not be distinguished at a distance, not knowing to whose field she might be led. But God had disposed and prepared her way before her. And he could have told her the whole of her future history and course. His gracious providence leads her to the very place where he designs to bless her. "Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz." The story is related in its appearance, as its events occurred. Her coming to this particular portion of the field seemed to be wholly accidental. But it was far enough from an accident in reality. It was God's own plan for her, another part of which was now coming out to her view. And when at last she finds the gracious end to which the whole is brought, she could look back upon this, and say, "Now I know why I was made so poor, and led to Boaz's field to glean."

How often is the gracious providence of God thus manifested in bringing the poor and

perishing soul under the ministry of the Word. The sinner may wander into the field of grace, he knows not why, with no idea of the Lord's provision of peace and security which are prepared for him. The great end to which all the arrangements of this gracious providence are directed is the saving of the soul. And when we really find this salvation, and are made partakers of a Saviour's love, we may look back upon every event of the whole course through which we have been led as expressly arranged for the accomplishment of this end. This was the point to which every thing else was tending, and to which every other fact was subordinate. To trace this merciful process in our past lives is one of our highest privileges. It shows us God's whole design concerning us. We rejoice to know that he leaves no unfinished work, and that the good work he has begun for us, he will carry on unto the day of the Lord Jesus. It encourages our hope. It quickens our energy. It excites our determination. It comforts our

depressions. It makes us happy even in our sorrows. How often have I traced this gracious providence of God in my own case ! How often in the case of others !

A young Englishman came as an agent of a Sheffield manufacturer to this country. He was engaged in his business in Philadelphia for a few months. His "hap was to light" on a boarding-house opposite my church. Convenience brought him there to our worship. But there the gracious Lord showed him his need, revealed to him his pardoning mercy, and made him know that he was a child of God. And because he was a son, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart. I never knew him. In a few months he returned to England. Two years after I received, through the custom-house, a package containing a little legacy from him, with a letter from his sister. He had died of a consumption at home, and sent his dying message of love and gratitude to me, with this memento of his affection,

and an account of his happy conversion under the Gospel in that church.

Two young men who had wasted their lives in profligacy and sin, and in their despairing madness had resolved to go out in a last debauch, and then become suicides together, passed our church on Wednesday evening, as our congregation were gathering there. They, unaccountably to themselves, were led to go in and seat themselves by the door. God sent an arrow of his truth to each of their hearts. They came out together when the service closed, each ignorant of the feelings of the other, and walked away for a time in silence. They soon announced to each other, in astonishment, their mutual feelings and new purpose of life. They walked the streets in conversation until morning. God had called them both to a knowledge of his love to them. "Their hap was to light" in the Saviour's field. They lived to witness a good profession. One was called to glory in his early manhood. The

other still lives to preach the Gospel which he once destroyed. In all this you will see any thing but accident.

Many such illustrations have I seen. How many daughters have I known, brought for education, where they attended our ministry, with no thought of the Lord's purpose concerning them, whose "hap" it was to glean salvation in the field of a gracious Kinsman of whom they had no knowledge. Singular are some such illustrations. A gay and fashionable young woman was under my ministry for a long time, with no apparent concern. One Thursday evening I was unexpectedly called upon to supply the pulpit of a clergyman who was ill, in another part of the city. The "hap" of this young lady was to pass that church just as the bell was ringing for worship. She did not know even what house of worship it was. But seeing the people going in, though she had never been to an evening service in the week before she joined them. To her

astonishment, her own minister arose to officiate. God sent the word to her heart, and she went home conscious of her guilt and danger in her unpardoned sin. On the next morning, before her own family had risen, she sought me for counsel and instruction, and gave me the history of the evening's work, and of her sleepless, sorrowing night. God now sent his own Spirit to teach her the things which were freely given to her of God. She embraced the Gospel. She walked in a new life. She honored the Saviour in her family. She triumphed in the hopes of the Gospel, in a peaceful departure, after several years of fidelity to Christ, the memory of which was a precious legacy to those from whom she was taken. How wonderful appear such facts! But every Christian may find in his own life a providence just as distinct, if not so striking. Why these things are so arranged we can give no account, but that which the Saviour gives:—"Even so,

Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." The appearance is, that our lighting on the field of Boaz is a "hap." But the result shows that this was God's own way to save and feed a child whom he had chosen for himself before the world began. And the issue is, that we give him all the glory who hath loved us, and called us with an holy calling, and made us everlasting partakers of a Saviour's triumph through the riches of his own grace.

The next step in Ruth's history is the peculiar crisis at which she came into the field. It was at the time of a gracious visit from the master of the reapers, and the owner of the land. "Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." I need not stop to remark upon the value of this illustration of domestic and social relations. But how much better sounds the encouraging voice of responsive religion, the mutual recognition of

the presence of God by master and servants, than the language of censure and recrimination ! How happily might we transfer the example of Boaz to the workshop of our artisans, the counting-house of our merchants, and the families of our housekeepers—and compel men who see them, to say, “ Surely the fear of God is in this place ! ” Happy is the house or scene of business and occupation where both the master and the servants are exercising themselves to maintain a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men ; with good will doing service as unto the Lord, and not unto men. Ruth could not have had a more encouraging exhibition of her kinsman than this. She sees him first in the expression of his kindness to others. His manner and feeling are expressive of the highest dignity and love. She can confide in him from the very start. She has no fears now that she may not “ find grace in his sight.” And as the sound of his cheerful salutation catches her ear, and she looks

up to see the dignified form of the stranger who approaches with so much benevolence, and such consideration for the laborers who are gathering his harvest, she takes the utmost encouragement for herself, and can glean with a freedom of spirit and thankfulness of confidence, that she had not before. Ah, who can tell how much may be the influence of words and acts of kindness and love ! They are not only "twice blessed." They may give life and hope to many who have had no connection with them but that of an accidental witness. They are an expenditure which can never be lost ; a cheap outlay for an investment of incomparable value. Ruth's whole life would probably carry the influence of this first opening address of Boaz to his servants. And in all her subsequent veneration for him, and delight in him, she could never forget the impression which his first appearance made upon her mind.

How applicable to our purpose is this illus-

tration ! The first sight of a Saviour is attractive and lovely to the seeking, sinful soul. The sinner comes into the midst of his flock, and is struck with the precious blessings which they enjoy. The shepherd stands in their midst. Jesus is there, to awaken, instruct, sanctify, and feed his people. The hearts of all are evidently refreshed by him. He blesses them, in the ministry of his word, by the teaching of his Spirit. They praise him with grateful homage in return. The whole scene is awakening and attractive. The sinner's heart is moved and drawn.

“’Tis like a little heaven below ;
I have been there, and still would go.”

The Apostle says, “Falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you, of a truth.” The Prophet says, they shall say, “We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.” Thus often the most abiding impressions of the value of religion, of the excellence of a Saviour's worth,

and the happiness of those who faithfully wait upon him, are received. Men are drawn to Christ, and made happy in trusting him, by the enjoyment which his people evidently derive from his service. And nothing is more important than that Christians should ever wear an aspect and maintain an influence which will adorn the doctrine they profess. "I see," said Richard Cecil, contemplating his own sinful, wasted life, in his youth, "I see two unquestionable facts. First, my mother is greatly afflicted in circumstances, body, and mind ; and yet I see that she cheerfully bears up under it, by the support which she derives from constantly retiring to her closet and reading her Bible. Second, that she has a secret spring of comfort of which I know nothing ; while I, who seek pleasure by every means, seldom or never find it. If, however, there is any such secret in religion why may I not attain it as well as my mother ? I will immediately seek it from God. He rose from his bed instantly, and

began to pray." His experience and reasoning have been that of thousands. And when the Saviour comes in thus to bless his people, "sweetly the sacred odors spread." Sinners are drawn and encouraged to come to one so gracious and so compassionate. The reapers of his harvest are animated and strengthened by his presence, and the word of his grace goes out with special power to the souls of those who hear.

"Adoring saints around him stand,
And thrones and powers before him fall;
The God shines gracious through the man,
And sheds sweet glories on them all."

XII.

The Welcome Reception.

Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, I pray you let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: So she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing that I am a stranger?—RUTH, ii. 5-10.

“God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.” He has wise and sufficient reasons for every step. He makes us at last to see the wisdom which has

governed his whole course. But while his plans are coming out to our view, it is only a little part that is to be seen at a time. We must wait to the end to know his whole design. We can imagine many ways in which Boaz and Ruth might have been made acquainted with each other. But surely none which would have been better adapted to awaken the deepest and tenderest mutual interest in the mind of each. She appears in all the loveliness of virtuous modesty, humbly toiling for a mother's support and comfort, though unused to labor. How could he avoid the most affectionate consideration and respect for her? The best daughter will habitually make the best wife. He appears before her clothed with dignity and benevolence. The law of kindness is on his tongue. His dependents delight to welcome his approach. The whole appearance of this dignified and tender-hearted stranger would command her reverence and confidence. His aspect and voice took from her all fear in

the prosecution of her work, and his words of kindness made her at once happy and at home, though poor and a stranger in his field. We are now to witness their first mutual introduction, and the WELCOME RECEPTION which he gives to her.

First we have the rich kinsman's notice of her, addressed to his head servant. "Whose damsel is this?" The field of Boaz is a well-ordered field, in which is due subordination and respect, and no violence or confusion. There was one set over the reapers who was held responsible for their conduct, and for the whole care of the field committed to him. And when the master comes to visit his land he calls this one to a special account. But extensive as are the concerns of Boaz, the poor stranger whom the Lord hath led there is not forgotten. Happy indeed is such prosperity as this! The heart is not lifted up, the spirit is not made selfish and arrogant. There is a tender care for the poor maintained amidst the

enjoyments and luxuries of wealth. It would be difficult to tell which is the more beautiful aspect of human character, the open and generous liberality of the rich, or the patient and uncomplaining submission of the poor ; the "largeness of heart, like the sea-shore," of Solomon, or the quiet and contended endurance of the widow of Sarepta. Both are here before us. One rich in acts of love, and the other in the patience of hope and trial. And when Boaz came to visit his plenteous fields, he saw nothing there so truly beautiful as the character and conduct of Ruth. His servant, had he known the whole will of God, might have given a far higher description of her than the mere account of her earthly origin, her poverty, and her toil.

Thus the Saviour comes to visit his earthly field, and calls the servants whom he has set over it to account for their charge. He walks amidst the candlesticks, and holds the stars in his right hand. His ministers watch for souls as they who must give an account.

Not the poorest stranger is unnoticed or forgotten by him. It is a blessed thought. The Saviour sees. The poor, the lonely, the neglected, in all their needs and sorrows, are marked by his eye. The poor widow's two mites were not forgotten. The Syro-Phœnician was not sent away. Bartimeus was not despised. Lazarus was not rejected. Jesus may be considered as asking his ministers continually, of one and another in their flock, Who is that? And they should be able to reply. He will call them at last to an account for all, and for every soul intrusted to them they must answer. Happy, could they all say,

“Hast thou a lamb in all thy flock
 My soul disdains to feed?
 Hast thou a foe before whose face
 I fear thy cause to plead?”

Sad is the neglected church, where the pastor is not prepared for a question like this, in regard to all the members of his flock. He should be able to adopt the very words of the

Great Shepherd, "I know my sheep, and am known of mine. They know my voice ; and they follow me." He should be able to take up to all, the exhortation of the Apostle, "Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ." What can compensate him for the shame of his ignorance and neglect, if the Saviour shall ask in vain, "With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness?" Indulgences, enjoyments, honors, all will fade in that great day. What a dying reflection was that of the eminent Archbishop Williams in the reign of Charles I. : "I have passed through many places of honor and trust, both in Church and State, more than any of my order in England, this seventy years before. But were I assured that by my preaching I had converted but one soul unto God, I should take therein more spiritual joy and comfort, than in all the honors and offices which have been bestowed upon me."

This question of Boaz brings us to the reply which the servant makes. He is not in-

quired of in vain. He has made himself acquainted with the whole history of Ruth. And in giving his account, he uses great skill and kindness, in setting forth the advantageous circumstances of her case. He tells of her *origin* : She was a daughter of Moab, a stranger, "the Moabitish damsel." He tells of her *return*, her emigration from Moab to Israel : "She came back with Naomi, out of the country of Moab." He tells of her *need* : her poverty compelled her to beg permission to glean ; of her *gentle humility* : "She said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves ;" of her *perseverance* : "She hath continued from the morning even until now." His account is marked by the evidence of the utmost kindness and compassion. He does not feel the poor and dependent to be in his way. Nor does her lonely poverty tempt him to treat her with negligence or disrespect.

When we think of this, as an illustration of the account we may give of some daugh-

ters of the Lord Almighty who are committed to our charge, how appropriate seems the whole story. To create and maintain a familiar and intimate acquaintance with the members of the flock committed to him, is a most important instrument of usefulness to a faithful pastor. They should be made willing to seek his counsel. Their experience should prove him to be to them a confidential, faithful friend. He should be acquainted with their spiritual state, their minds, their peculiar feelings and circumstances. He should know their religious experience ; and encourage, at whatever cost of labor and occupation of his time, their free communication of their doubts, and trials, and cares. The whole influence and value of his ministry will be greatly dependent on this knowledge of his people. The preacher's work can only be really effective, and an instrument of blessing, as it rightly divides the word of truth, giving to each their portion of meat in due season. The work of public preaching is far the least

laborious and trying part of the ministration of the Gospel. And it is by no means the most important or the most useful part, when separated from the faithful watchfulness and oversight of the sound and sympathizing pastor.

But how happy is such an account of the Saviour's field as the head reaper here gives ! Suppose I could say of all the youthful females in the field around me, as each one severally appeared for my account, "This also *was* a daughter of Moab, but she has come back." How applicable to them would become Paul's account of the Corinthian Christians, "Such were you, but ye have been washed, ye have been justified, ye have been sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." She has come back. Under a deep sense of her sinfulness, and conscious of her empty, wasted life, she has come with self-renouncing humility, to glean in the Saviour's field. With persevering devotion she has continued from the morning even until

now. She was a vain, worldly, thoughtless child of earth. But she has been converted—made a new creature—old things have passed away—all things have become new. Now she is in the world, but she is not of the world; and the residue of her life she means to spend, though in the flesh, yet according to the will of God. Ah, what a happy account would this be! I would that I could imagine it a true account. But alas! our daughters are not all Ruths. Frivolity and sin, the mirth and the sensual giddiness of Moab, hold too many of them in bondage still. When will they awake to see the folly of their earthly mind, to realize the wretched emptiness of a life of pleasure, dead while they live, and to rejoice in the permission to glean in the fields of grace and salvation, which their gracious but unknown Kinsman has spread before them? Yet let me rejoice over many, very many, whom the Lord has given me, of whom this history of Ruth would be a perfectly true account. God has permit-

ted me to be the instrument of leading many such from Moab to Bethlehem. They delight to gather now in fields of which they had before no knowledge. They love the assemblies for the Saviour's worship. They value every opportunity of instruction in the Saviour's truth. They love to join the music of his praise. They rejoice in offering him the constant incense of their secret prayer. They gather happiness from the teaching of his word. They would rather be door-keepers in his house, than abide in the tents of ungodliness. They bear his cross with pleasure. They endure for him the voice of reproach, and the strife of tongues, with unshrinking fidelity. They teach the ignorant. They minister to the poor. They console the sorrowing. They are the joy and strength of loving parents. They bless their households. They adorn the doctrine they profess. Their example honors the Saviour, encourages the church, and wins even the admiration of the worldly. Is there any thing on earth so beau-

tiful as this consistent, living course of youthful piety? Is there an earthly treasure to a father's heart to be compared to a faithful, guileless, Christian daughter?

“And if there be a human tear,
From passion's dross refined and clear,
A tear so limpid and so meek,
It would not stain an angel's cheek,
'Tis that which pious fathers shed
Upon a duteous daughter's head.”

Let me encourage such to press onward to the end. The fools of the world may scoff. But Jesus approves. The Spirit guides. Angels protect and guard. “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” Glean on from morning until evening in the Saviour's harvest. When you are wearied, repose, like Ruth, a little in the field. But leave it not. The Lord whom your souls love will be your comforter and friend—the strength of your heart, and your eternal portion. Every day will add to your happiness in his service. And as his smiles attend you, and

his approving blessing follows you, and his gracious care prospers you, and leads you on through grace to glory, your path will be one of increasing happiness to the end.

“High heaven, that heard your solemn vow,
That vow renewed, shall daily hear,
Till in life’s latest hour you bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”

The answer of the servant of Boaz leads us to Boaz’s own address to the lonely stranger. “Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field; neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? And when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn.” How kindly and freely he welcomes her to his ample provisions! And lest she should not understand the openness of his invitation, he calls her attention particularly to this fact of

her entire welcome to every provision there. How he catechizes her in his offers of grace ! “Hearest thou not, my daughter ?” Her modesty had retired from the praises of the servant, and her gentle, humbled spirit had hidden itself from such an applauding introduction. And her rich kinsman kindly arrests her attention to the fact which he intended to impress, that she was to enjoy the provision for her wants with perfect freedom. The Saviour’s grace is thus open and free. Whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely. Complete forgiveness, everlasting redemption, are offered without money and without price, to the acceptance of the sinner who will receive them. But man must be constantly assured of the freeness of the Saviour’s love, and urged to accept and embrace it. The Lord calls your attention especially to this. “Hearest thou not ?” “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “Whosoever cometh, shall in no wise be cast out.” “Believe, and

thou shalt be saved." Here are abundant supplies of all that you can desire or ask; and all given without recompense, or hope of return from you.

He urges her to remain in the field to which the gracious providence of God had sent her. "Go not to glean in another field." He would have the whole privilege and comfort of supplying all her wants. He has enough and to spare, and she need fear no lack of provision while she remains with him. He wishes not to divide with any the blessing of sustaining one so worthy of his care. Our gracious Kinsman feels equally jealous of any partnership or competition in his work of grace for you. He lets you know that if you attempt to be saved in any other way, Christ shall profit you nothing. There is salvation in none other. It is all of grace, and the works of righteousness which you can do effect nothing toward your justification in him. Go not then to glean in another field. Your salvation is all by

faith in the perfect obedience and all-sufficient death of the Lord Jesus Christ for you. Be satisfied with that. Live upon that. To whom else can you go? He only has the words of eternal life. The field of human works and merit is there before you. But what can you get from that but condemnation and the wages of sin? The field of mere formalism and superstition is there. But it can yield nothing for you save despair and death. The field of earthly giddiness and indulgence is there. But this is polluted Moab again; why will you run back to that? The field of indifference and mere unbelief is there. But its fruits will be gall and wormwood at the last, when eternity overwhelms you, and you have no hope. There is no field in which you can gather happiness, and rest, and abiding peace, but the field of Christ. In that every provision is made for your enjoyment for time and for eternity. And you will glean nothing there which will not promote your welfare for both.

Well may we apply to you Boaz's address, "Go not from hence. Abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them." In similar words, the gracious bridegroom of the Church says, "Go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherd's tents." Nothing is more important for your religious character, than appropriate religious society. The examples and influence of faithful people of God are a precious help to you in your Christian course. You read the biographies of those who have finished their course, and kept the faith and have entered into their rest. You have with you, and around you, many who are striving to walk in the strait and narrow way which leadeth unto life. Their light shines before you. Their daily walk encourages and animates you. Keep fast by them. You have a faithful and simple ministry of the Gospel. You have a pure and blessed form of public worship. Every benefit

and advantage for you is there. You have the simple and appropriate ordinances of the Lord's house. Jesus has promised to meet you there. It will be good for you to be found in no other field. Be not tempted to the fields of error, or of mirth, or of worldly forgetfulness of God. Be the companion always of those who fear God, and turn away your feet from the paths of evil men. The landmarks among these various fields, which separate them from the field which the Lord hath blessed, may not be always perfectly distinct and apparent to you. Try no experiment how far you may go toward these strange fields and return in safety. Dwell in the heart of the land, and make the fact always sure, that you are with the Lord and his chosen flock.

Here you have every promise of protection and supply. Your gracious Kinsman has charged his ministers to help and guide you, not to hurt or hinder you. He has bid them draw for you water from the wells of salva-

tion. And yours is the privilege of their attainments and their labors. Vain, indeed, are all these without a Saviour's blessing. But Jesus will not leave you comfortless. He will come to you. His angels are guardian keepers, and ministering spirits for you. By them he defends you night and day. They take charge of the feeble and desolate of the flock. They bear you in their hands, lest you hurt your foot against a stone. Surely no offer can be made to you, like the privilege of gleaning in Jesus' fields of truth and grace. And when he stands before you like Boaz, with the words of such gracious welcome, your privilege is great indeed. O, listen to his earnest exhortation and appeal, and let your glad heart respond to him. Yes, Lord. Here will I dwell, and this shall be my rest for ever, for it is the very joy of my heart.

"Thou in whose presence my soul takes delight;
On whom in affliction I call;
My comfort by day, and my song in the night,
My hope, my salvation, my all.

“O why should I wander an alien from thee?
Or cry in the desert for bread?
Thy foes will rejoice when my sorrows they see,
And smile at the tears I have shed.”

Ruth's humble and grateful answer to her unknown Kinsman may conclude our present thoughts. “She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”

What deep humility! What consciousness of need! What confession of her own unworthiness! What affectionate gratitude for the kindness he has displayed! It is just so that the loving-kindness of the Lord humbles the pardoned sinner to the dust. He feels himself the object of such grace and boundless mercy that his own unworthiness and guilt are more apparent to him than ever before. Thus the Lord himself describes his mind, “That thou mayest be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for

all that thou hast done." The freeness of the divine love to our guilty souls, washing away all our sins in his own blood, covering us with his own perfect righteousness, and adopting and owning us as his children, when we were before so disobedient and rebellious, will always thus humble us before God. It will make us more afraid to sin—more watchful against temptation—more anxious in every thing to do the will of God in time to come. We become earnest and watchful not to lose a privilege so great, or in any thing to offend or wound our loving Master and Lord. Our experience of his pardoning love carries us back to remember all our rebellions and sins against him. We see that it is he who has sought us, in his own electing, distinguishing love, and not we who first sought him. He says, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." All our boasting, therefore, is excluded by the freeness of his pardoning

grace, and the new creating power of his divine Spirit, who said to us "Live," when we were dead in our sins. Thus every real Christian feels deeply humbled and abased in the presence of that holy Lord who became our kinsman that he might be our Redeemer and our Saviour. Thus the saints in glory feel. They cast their crowns before his throne. They proclaim Him alone worthy to receive the glory, who was slain, and has redeemed them to God by his blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ; and made them unto God kings and priests.

My dear young friends, is this your mind ? Do you thus cast yourselves in the dust, with a deep sense of your sinfulness, before the feet of your gracious Saviour ? Have you ever come truly to his feet in the real renewing of your heart by the power of his Holy Spirit ? Does he see you casting out all proud thoughts of your own greatness, and desires for your own glory, and wishing to count every thing but loss for his sake ? Can he testify to your

inmost purpose and effort, in every thing to honor him, and carry out his will? Ah, this is religion. This is the work of his own hand. This is the blessedness of his people. This is the happiness of those who wait upon him. Seek it with all your heart—earnest, determined to obtain a blessing of such inestimable worth, and to live alone and for ever, for that gracious Master who feeds you with the bread of his truth, comforts you with the refreshment of his promises, supports you by the power of his grace, and will receive you to the kingdom of his glory.

XIII.

The Gracious Approbation.

“ And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. Then she said, Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. And Boaz said unto her, At meal-time come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.—RUTH, ii. 11-16.

WHAT mercies God is pleased to lay up for those who love him! They cover all our wants in the present life, and all our possible desires for the future. Earthly friends may fail, and earthly sources may disappoint us.

But we can never really put the trust of our heart in God, and be disappointed in the end. Our fidelity to him may be secret—confined, as we suppose often, to the consciousness of our own hearts. But he brings our secret things to light, and openly rewards us for all that we have done and suffered for him, however privately.

Ruth begins now to reap the abundant harvest which is growing for her in the divine purposes of mercy—a harvest of which Boaz's fields are only a part, and of which indeed all that Boaz possessed was but a feeble illustration. She had been faithful in that which appeared to be the least, and now she was to be rewarded with that which seemed to be much. We proceed in her story with delight, hardly knowing whether to admire it more as the history of her kinsman and herself, or as an exhibition of the grace and goodness of our Lord and Saviour to whom it so clearly points.

We have first to remark upon the gracious

approbation which Boaz bestows upon her. She thought herself unknown, and perhaps neglected. But this gracious stranger appears to be perfectly familiar with her whole history, and though he knew not her personally, her faithfulness to her mother had been fully related to him. It is thus you may often think yourself unknown, and unobserved in your efforts to do right in your different relations of life, when there are many eyes upon you, watching your character, and many ears may be listening to what the Lord has enabled you thus to do for him. Give yourself no concern about this. Seek always the grace to think and to do such things as are right. God your Guardian and Protector will see that you have all the reputation and recompense which is good for you. Whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report, follow after them, without reference to the knowledge or approbation of others around you. Ruth supposed herself concealed in the field of Boaz. But he declares to her

that her faithfulness to Naomi had been fully related to him, and he knew her well. In the most kind and delicate manner, he recounts the facts of her past history ; animating and encouraging her with just approbation, and not mortifying or abashing her with unreasonable flattery. He recites her love to her mother, her faith in God, her affectionate trust in him, leaving all that she loved for his sake, and coming to join herself to his people whom she had not known before. It would not be an inferior use of this passage, to commend to your notice its refinement and dignity. What an illustration it is of that condescension without haughtiness, of that commendation without assumption, of that familiarity without coarseness, which are so peculiarly the attributes of a noble mind, and the results of what we call good breeding in social life. We may often have occasion to remark, that never was there given to man such a manual for elegance and delicacy without pretense, in his social relations, as the

Bible gives. It is politeness proceeding from benevolence and growing out of real sympathy, and, like the Greek word which means both, it is beautiful and good—and beautiful because it is good.

But there is a far higher illustration here than this. Thus the Saviour recounts to his people, and for them, the acts of their life which have manifested their love to him. He pardons freely all their sins. He justifies them freely in his own obedience and merit. But then he tells us he is not unrighteous to forget their labors of love ; and that not even a cup of cold water given by them to a suffering brother, in his name, shall be forgotten. He gives us an illustration, in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, of the manner in which he will recite in their hearing the acts of their obedience, and thus shows them the way in which they shall have their due praise of God. Can you not understand well the distinction between being justified by the merits of your own works,

and your works being accepted as the evidence of the reality of your faith and the sincerity of your love for Christ? Nothing that you do is worthy the Saviour's notice. But nothing that you really do for him will be unnoticed by him. You will never be rewarded *for* your works. But you will be judged *by* your works. They are the proofs of your faith, as the fruits on the tree are the evidences of its character and its worth. Jesus may say of many a poor, lonely gleaner in his field, who hardly supposes himself noticed by any one, who toils in the sincerity of his spirit, to do and to bear his Master's will, and feels himself to be less than the least of all the Lord's mercies to him: "Yes, I know thee well. I have seen all thy labors, all thine attainments, and all thy failures. I have seen thine endeavors to do right, when thine efforts never came to any fruit. I have seen all thy sorrows over thine inability to accomplish more. I know thy temptations and thy difficulties well. I have

seen thee leave the land of thy nativity, thy careless, sinful state—the companions and the pleasures of thy sin—and, forsaking father and mother, come to seek a shelter and a home with me. I have seen thee in every step of thy progress, as my own Spirit led thee on from strength to strength, in thy desire to do my will. And nothing that thou hast done for me shall be left without its reward.” Ah, thus does our great Kinsman notice us in all our conflicts and cares. He speaks his gracious approbation to our own hearts. He makes us feel a happiness and peace within, under his tender smile of approval, though the world may reject us and men may cast us out. His Spirit bears witness with our spirits, and brings the promises and presence of Jesus to our hearts; and then we rejoice in tribulations, and prefer the reproach of Christ to the treasures of the world; and choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Certainly there is nothing on earth so blessed and so precious as the approbation of our divine Master, speaking in our own hearts, of the service we have feebly but sincerely tried to render to him.

But Boaz not only expresses approbation, he also speaks of recompense to Ruth. "The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to rest." She shall not be unrewarded. Naomi may not be able to do any thing for her. But Naomi has other paymasters in the Lord's employ beside herself. Our acts of benevolence and love for Christ's sake *can* never go without their result of blessing even in this life. The merciful man doeth good to his own soul. We comfort *the* needy and the sorrowing, and we are *thus* preparing comforters for ourselves in the persons of others whom the Lord will raise up to minister to our wants. We aid the children of the poor, and we are laying up a heritag^e,

for our children in the kindness of others whom we know not. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed on the earth." It would be an interesting subject for our observation and study, how constantly and regularly God repays our acts of love by others in their own kind. So that in mere material results we lose nothing. "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth." "The liberal soul shall be made fat. And he that watereth others shall be watered also himself." I knew a faithful woman who had been the succorer of many. But her husband died, and left her impoverished, in the settlement of what was considered a good estate. She had a son whom she tenderly loved, and whom she struggled to educate, and elevate from the depressing influence of unexpected poverty. A man of wealth became acquainted with her condition, and, through the agency of

another, provided for the thorough education of the boy. The son became eminent and wealthy. The last years of his venerated mother were made rich and happy by his provision. She lived till he was fifty years of age. And prosperity and honor crowned them both. And better than all this, true religion adorned their characters, and made their habitation blessed. But the rich man who had educated him died insolvent, and left his own children without provision. And this boy, who was now a man of property and influence, took charge of them, and educated and established them in respectable life. And they still live to witness that the Lord is gracious, and that blessed is the man who trusteth in him. Here is recompense. And it would be recompense enough for all that man can do for his fellow man. "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." I have no doubt that when God reads to us his book

of providence we shall see that this promise never failed in a single instance.

But apart from this result of recompense, there is also our own happiness in the work itself. "It is more blessed," that is, it is happier, a happier state and habit of mind, a happier condition of feeling and thought, "to give than to receive." Whatever we do in kindness to others for Christ's sake, he returns to us in our own secret personal enjoyments. He ministers to us a peace and blessedness in the work which is our inward possession, and which comes to us without any reference to outward results. When Boaz said to Ruth, "The LORD recompense thy work," she might have replied to him that she was recompensed already. It was happiness enough in itself to labor for a mother that she loved. She was gathering far richer fruits than the scattered ears of her kinsman's corn. Her peaceful, hopeful, grateful mind which God had given to her, under the truth that Naomi had

taught her, made the day of her labor for Naomi a day of thankfulness. This is a recompense you will never lose in your efforts to honor the Lord in acts of benevolence and love, at home or abroad. Be kind, be generous, be forbearing, be tender, be affectionate in your relations to all. Do it for Jesus' sake, because he has been so to you. And though you may be disappointed in some of the outward results of your efforts, you shall never fail in reaping this blessed harvest of joy within. How beautifully is this thought displayed in those anonymous lines !

“ A poor, wayfaring man of grief
 Hath often crossed me on my way,
 Who sued so humbly for relief,
 That I could never answer Nay.
 I had not power to ask his name,
 Whither he went, or whence he came;
 Yet there was something in his eye
 That won my love, I knew not why.

“ Once, when my scanty meal was spread,
 He entered ; not a word he spake ;
 Just perishing for want of bread,
 I gave him all ; he blessed it, brake,
 And ate, but gave me part again.
 Mine was an angel's portion then ;
 And while I fed with eager haste,
 The crust was manna to my taste.

"I spied him where a fountain burst
Clear from the rock ; his strength was gone ;
The heedless water mocked his thirst ;
He heard it, saw it hurrying on.
I ran and raised the sufferer up ;
Thrice from the stream he drained my cup ;
Dipped, and returned it running o'er ;
I drank, and never thirsted more.

"'Twas night : the floods were out ; it blew
A wintry hurricane aloof ;
I heard his voice abroad, and flew
To bid him welcome to my roof.
I warmed, I clothed, I cheered my guest ;
Laid him on mine own couch to rest ;
Then made the earth my bed, and seemed
In Eden's garden while I dreamed.

"Stripped, wounded, beaten nigh to death,
I found him by the highway side ;
I roused his pulse, brought back his breath,
Revived his spirit, and supplied
Wine, oil, refreshment ; he was healed.
I had, myself, a wound concealed ;
But, from that hour, forgot the smart,
And peace bound up my broken heart.

"In prison I saw him next, condemned
To meet a traitor's doom at morn ;
The tide of lying tongues I stemmed,
And honored him 'mid shame and scorn.
My friendship's utmost zeal to try,
He asked if I for him would die ;
The flesh was weak, my blood ran chill,
But the free spirit cried, ' I will !'

"Then, in a moment, to my view
 The stranger started from disguise;
 The tokens in his hands I knew;
 My Saviour stood before my eyes!
 He spake, and my poor name he named;
 'Of me thou hast not been ashamed;
 These deeds shall thy memorial be;
 Fear not; thou didst it unto me.' "

But Boaz prays for more than recompense.
 "A full reward be given thee, of the LORD
 God of Israel, under whose wings thou art
 come to trust." For full rewards in any
 course of human life, we must look beyond
 the present state of being. The Saviour says
 of the objects of beneficent action, "They can
 not recompense thee, but thou shalt be recom-
 pensed in the resurrection of the just." What-
 ever results come now from any of the acts of
 life, they are extremely partial. The final
 results are yet to be revealed. The death
 which is the wages of sin, is a death beyond
 the mere departure of a sinful spirit from the
 earth. And the glory which God has laid up
 for those who love him, it has not entered
 into the heart of man here to conceive. All

the present life is the mere seed time. The abundant harvest is to be gathered hereafter. But it will be surely gathered. The Saviour shall himself minister to those who have been faithful to him here, an abundant recompense, a full reward. If he shall smile upon you in approbation when you meet him face to face—if he shall welcome you with approval when you stand before him in judgment—if he shall bid you enter into his joy when eternity opens its doors in your view—if he shall witness to your fidelity in the presence of his angels—will not that one commencement of a happy eternity be in itself a full reward, an abundant recompense, for all that you can have done, or suffered, or lost for him, in the longest life of labor on the earth? And yet all that is but a commencement. The day has come when you shall be in the presence of the Lord for ever—when the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall dwell with you, and feed you, and lead you to living fountains of water, and you shall go no more out. I am

not hesitating or scanty in speaking of this state of reward. No. Though you are justified freely by the grace of God, and saved only by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for you, and nothing that you can do can have the least worth in the sight of an holy God, to challenge his favor or demand his acknowledgment, yet, nothing that you really do for Christ shall go without its reward. The hope of reward is not your motive, but the grateful love for Jesus who hath already saved you. But the love of Jesus for you has laid up for you the crown of his own righteousness, to be given to you in the last day. And he has himself assured you that what you sincerely do for his sake to the very least of his servants, the poorest of all whom his grace has saved, you do for him, and shall in no wise lose your reward.

But while the Saviour thus animates and encourages his disciples with the blessed hope before them, see how the answer of Ruth to Boaz illustrates their self-renouncing mind.

“Then she said, Let me find favor in thy sight, my lord, for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens.” The more generously a noble mind is dealt with, the more humble and unassuming does it become. This is eminently the case with the children of God when their divine Redeemer comforts and blesses them. Never do they feel so perfectly unworthy as when he pours the special ministration of the oil of gladness into their souls. He shows them his mercy and his faithfulness, and they are overwhelmed with a sense of their own utter guiltiness in his sight. This is their present mind : “Before honor goeth humility.” It is the herald of exaltation, the attending minister of real excellence. They are never separated. And the more glorious the exaltation of the honor becomes, the more multiplied will be the train and circle of the humility that waits around. How the Saviour illustrates this in the twen-

ty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew ! He recites the excellence of his people—he recounts the evidences which they have given of their fidelity to him—he proclaims the rewards which he bestows, accumulated as their faithfulness has been made manifest. But he represents them as perfectly self-renouncing. “Lord, when did we do all this ?” So completely is their mind and memory filled with his goodness that there is no standing-place there for any recollection of their own acts of love to him. So abounding and immeasurable appears his love to them, that less than nothing in the comparison, seems every act of theirs for him in return. Like Ruth, they can praise him for the comfort he has bestowed upon them, for the gracious and friendly way in which he has spoken to them. But all this only increases their sense of their own unworthiness of such mercy. And their cry and prayer is, that they may still find favor in his sight—that he would look upon them with eyes of mercy, and think of them

according to his own grace, and not according to their merits. This is the true and constant operation of the free grace of the Gospel upon the believing heart. "Faith worketh by love." First, by the love *of* Christ, which it receives, to subdue and sanctify the soul ; and then by the love *for* Christ which it produces, to glorify and honor the Saviour, on whom alone it rests. And throughout eternity it will say, "Not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory, for thy loving-kindness and thy truth's sake."

Boaz gracious provisions for the lonely stranger, crown and close this instructive interview. He invites her to come and partake with him of the meal he had prepared for his servants. He seats her in honor among the reapers of his harvest. He reaches forth his own hand to feed her at his table. He satisfies her need completely, and she departs in peace. He gives command to his servants to allow her the utmost liberty in gleaning, without reproach. He bids them in

the most delicate way to drop, as if by accident, still more abounding supplies in her way, that she may have more than a common gleaner's portion. Was any conduct of man ever more delicate, dignified, or beautiful? What a pattern it is of benevolence and refinement! But it is only a feeble illustration of the riches of a Saviour's grace. Is this not the very way in which our great Kinsman deals with those whom he loves and saves? He comes to the earthly assemblies of his people, and sits at the table he has spread for them, and bids them all to eat of the bread which he has provided, and to drink of the cup which he has mingled. It is the bread of life. It is the cup of salvation. He calls the poor fainting sinner to come without doubt or fear and take his place among the company of the redeemed—for every thing is there provided which he can need—abounding grace for abounding sin. He bids them always freely come, without hesitation, nor to imagine that they can bring any thing to the

feast which he has so bountifully prepared for the outcast and the poor. He ministers himself to their secret wants. He reaches forth with his own hand the parched corn of his sacrifice for them. He makes them, by his own Spirit, to feed upon that one offering made for them in his own burnt sacrifice in their behalf. And in this secret, personal, divine ministration of his Spirit to their souls, they eat, and are sufficed. It is hidden manna. It is enduring meat. It is life-giving bread. And they go on their way rejoicing with exceeding joy at the unexpected gifts and mercies which their great Kinsman has bestowed.

The Lord not only thus ministers to them personally. He also gives command concerning them. His ministers are sent forth to feed his people. In the fulfillment of their duty, they may honestly strive to finish the work committed to them. But they are completely ignorant of the Lord's gracious purposes to individuals in their ministry. They

try to break the bread of life, with wisdom and justice of application. But whom the Lord intends himself personally to feed, they can never know. They let fall the handfuls of his truth, his gracious promises, his solemn warnings, his earnest appeals, in the pathway of the field as they go on their work. But who shall really gather them, Jesus the Master of the field alone can order. How often some perfect stranger comes into the Church of God, and finds there the very message which his soul required ! He sees a man who seems to tell him all that he ever did. The very secrets of his heart appear to be disclosed. He wonders with amazement who can have proclaimed him there. He falls in secret on his face, and gives the glory to God. A handful has been dropped on purpose for him. The very thing he wanted, he has found. The very message he had longed for, he has heard. The Lord speaks to him face to face. " Surely," he says, " the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." Ah ! this is wonderful

ministration. But this is the Saviour's constant ministration. Thus he presents himself as the Master of our assemblies. Thus he comes as the great Prophet and Teacher of his people. Thus by his own Spirit he speaks in secret to their souls, and gives knowledge of salvation to those who are in darkness and the shadow of death.

O my young friends, may he speak so to you ! Open your hearts to receive his truth. Be grateful for his merciful visitations to you. Put nothing in his way, no obstinacy of your wills, no carelessness of your minds, no fretfulness of your rebellion, no pride of your unbelief, no hesitation to listen to, and obey his word. Is there a message from God for thee to-day ? Then gather it, and treasure it up, as dearer to you than thousands of gold and silver. All the things that can be desired are not to be compared with it. A message of salvation ! A call from Christ to his service and his kingdom ! An invitation to the marriage-supper of the Lamb ! An offer

from the Son of God, to feed and bless you with his own hands ! O ! it is incomparable blessedness ! It is inconceivable glory ! And yet here it is, given to you, pressed upon your acceptance, thrust into your bosoms, asking only to be received. Do not reject it. Eternity can never remedy the loss which, in a moment of time, you may thus experience. The whole world can never repay for the failure of the blessings which, in a handful of the Saviour's corn, in his own field, may be cast before you in vain.

XIV.

The Happy Discovery.

So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned; and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. And her mother-in-law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she showed her mother-in-law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter-in-law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley-harvest and of wheat-harvest; and dwelt with her mother-in-law.—RUTH, II. 17-23.

How important an office in the provision for human happiness does memory sustain! We are constantly ascending heights in our journey through life, from which we look back upon the ground over which we have

passed. As we go on, the elevation of these heights increases to the end, and we take still wider and further views of our own conduct and character as they pass before our mind. When the end of the present life shall come, and from eternity we look back upon the whole, how much of our happiness must depend upon the memory of the past ! God has graciously designed our memory to be the repository of joys for us. Every passing day should awaken new songs of gratitude for his goodness. And the close of life ought to be filled with expressions of our thankfulness for the mercies which have crowned the whole. But if we are compelled to look back upon privileges despised, upon mercies wasted, upon precious offers of salvation cast away, upon life all consumed in laboriously doing nothing, how can memory fail to be a storehouse of sorrow ? We are compelled to remember, and we have nothing to remember but that which gives us pain. O, that I could impress upon all my young friends the

importance of filling up their life, from the beginning, with happy provisions for the employment of memory in the end !

This is the point beautifully illustrated for us in the present portion of the history of Ruth. What successful gleanings in a right field ! She perseveres with patience to the end of her day. No gracious kindness of Boaz diminishes her industry. She does not sin because grace abounds. She is not tempted to idleness and self-indulgence because her wants have been so abundantly cared for by him. His tenderness to her becomes, on the contrary, a motive for increased energy and faithfulness. The Christian says, Now let me run, because I shall obtain. Let me work with earnestness and fidelity, because God worketh with me, according to his good pleasure. The more the Saviour blesses us, the more should we feel encouraged to do his will. The very kindness of his invitations and his promises sustains our faith and patience to the end. Thus glean on until the

evening. Lay up for yourselves a good foundation, and build upon it to the end. Let your evidences and fruits be abundant and clear, that an abundant entrance may be ministered to you in the end, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Ruth beats out the barley she had gathered, about an ephah, nearly a bushel. It was a most successful result of her labor for the day. Surely as she looked upon it, her heart swelled with gratitude to God who had led her there, and to Boaz who had welcomed her with such compassion. Her spirit rejoiced in the anticipation of her mother's delight, when she should see the successful result of her work. Now she might reverse Naomi's account of herself, for she went out in the morning empty, and came back in the evening full. She took up her load with joy, heavy as the burden of it really was, and probably no evening of her life had ever been so happy as this, on which she returned laden with the fruits of her own in-

dust, and of Boaz' munificence to her. She forgot that she was a beggar, in the joyful result of the Lord's goodness to her.

This I call successful gleanings in a right field. Will a life's gleanings in any other field but that of your rich Kinsman give you the same result? Will the gleanings of sensual pleasure, or of giddy frivolity, or of accumulating gain, or of earthly ambition, or of mere indulgence and gratification in any shape, lay up for you this evening fullness on which your memory may delight to dwell? Will you look back upon a merely worldly, selfish day, when the shadows of the evening are stretched out, and feel that it has been a happy one? Will you love then, in the prospect of eternity, to count your gleanings there, and contemplate the pleasures which they have successively afforded you? Ah, why do I ask you? I know it all before your evening comes. "Miserable comforters are ye all," will be the bitter expression of your anguished hearts. The hour has then arrived when

these painted vails are all decayed, and the wretchedness of a life of sin will be seen and felt, without a comforter. There is no successful gleanings but in the field of Jesus. *There* are blessings unmingled, pleasures without alloy, riches that wax not old. However unworthy may appear your very best attainments, however idle and empty may seem your most devoted hours, when compared with the worth of the object you have pursued, there will be no disappointment in the object itself. Memory will delight to dwell on the love you have received, on the Saviour's kindness in leading you to his field, on the gracious welcome which made you there at home, on the many tokens of his favor to you, on the gifts of grace which have made your day often unspeakably happy, on the divine strength which encouraged and enabled you to persevere in the path in which he led you. And then, when you reflect upon all that he has done for you and with you, what antici-

pations of delight will arise in the contemplation of the future !

“His voice, as the sound of the dulcimer sweet,
Is heard through the shadow of death ;
The cedars of Lebanon bow at his feet,
The air is perfumed with his breath.

“He looks, and ten thousands of angels rejoice,
And myriads wait for his word ;
He speaks, and eternity, filled with his voice,
Reëchoes the praise of the Lord.”

But we may follow Ruth with the result of her successful gleanings to her mother's home, and there we find them in mutual congratulations over the goodness of the Lord to them both. She carried home her treasure, both the gleanings of the field, and the portion of the provision which Boaz gave her. Naomi looked with astonishment upon her success. Where could she have gleaned to bring back such a result as this ? Who was it that had so favored her gentle, lonely daughter ? Before she has time to learn, she pours out her prayer for the gracious blessings of God to rest upon him. “Blessed be he that did take

knowledge of thee." It was an evening of peace without anxiety, of pleasure without remorse. Which of them derived the most pleasure from the goodness of God, that had so favored and blessed them on that day, it would be difficult to say. Such mutual congratulation and delight can come only in the train of true piety and of faithful devotion to a Saviour's cause. Whether you examine the successive results of life as they are passing, or consider the full issue of it when the whole has gone, the privilege of true Christians is sincere and constant congratulation. The result of all earthly schemes and pursuits is disappointment and recrimination. You may follow the children of pleasure and folly to any point of their history, and whenever they stop to consider, you find them looking back with regret and anguish, and looking upon each other with hostility and bitterness. How often must they exclaim that others have beguiled them into sin ; others tempted them to transgression. They suffer painful,

dreadful loss, but they charge their guilt, in part at least, upon the companions of their sin. This mutual recrimination among unpardoned sinners can not but be a permanent result of their transgressions. Whatever they have gained when God taketh away their souls, their only portion is the bitterness of remorse, hateful and hating one another. But the gatherers in the field of Jesus find unmingled joy. He that soweth, and he that reapeth, rejoice together. Converted parents and children delight in each other. Pastors find the ransomed souls which have been given to them, their joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord at his coming. As the children of God press onward together, "Oft in danger, oft in woe," they sing together of the loving-kindness of the Lord. Retrospection and hope, anticipation and memory combine together, to cause them to triumph in every place. The Ruths come home to pour out the treasures of grace which they have received, and the Naomis give

thanks over them for the goodness which has taken such knowledge of them. Upon every such habitation the glory of God rests as a crown and a defense. Increasing happiness marks the character and experience of every religious family, and the ways through which God leads them are ways of pleasantness and peace. These mutual congratulations constitute one of the greatest comforts of their journey in life. And the glorious revelations of eternity, when the saints of God have all arrived at their home in safety, will show them rejoicing over each other with joy and singing, and uniting in a new and everlasting song of praise for all the triumphs of divine grace, and the treasures of divine love which they have received. How attractive, my dear young friends, is this view of the Christian's condition ! He may be poor, and yet he is happy. He may be lonely, and yet thousands rejoice over him. He may think himself unknown, and yet there are thousands in whom, if he should pour out his heart to them, he

would find the truest and deepest sympathy. O let us cast our lot with them !

Ruth, made happier by her mother's gratitude and joy, tells her in whose fields she had been so successfully employed. "The man's name with whom I wrought is Boaz." He was a stranger to her, but not to Naomi. And Naomi instantly discerns the peculiar providence which had thus led her daughter to her kinsman's field. She sees the goodness of the Lord in this unexpected arrangement. This was the kindness of the Lord continued to the living and to the dead. And she gratefully prays that the blessing of this faithful God may rest upon Boaz, who had been employed as the instrument of his mercy this day. She revealed at once to Ruth his peculiar relation to them. He was their near kin, one of their next kinsmen—the goel to whom they had a right by God's own law to look for protection and support. I have explained to you before the rights and obligations of this appointed

kinsman. These divine appointments Naomi now explained to Ruth. How happy was the discovery that was thus made! Ruth found not only that she was not deserted, as she supposed, but that the very man whose relationship she might claim, was the one who had extended such kindness to her when he was unknown and a stranger. Their evening's conversation had now a new subject. And the hours would appear short while they dwelt together upon their kinsman's tenderness, fidelity, and love.

Thus, as the two disciples went upon their road to Emmaus, a stranger joined their company. He asked the cause of their sadness. He remonstrated with their unbelief. He opened the sacred Scriptures, and showed them the divine provisions of a suffering and triumphant Saviour. He joined them at their table, and brake their loaf and gave it to them with his own hands. Their eyes were opened. It was their Lord. They remembered how their hearts had burned

within them while he opened the bread of life to their souls. How happy was the discovery ! They could not contain it in themselves. Though it was night, and they were sheltered, as they had thought, for the night, they instantly arose and walked back their sixty furlongs' journey to Jerusalem, to tell of all they had seen and heard. Ah, how often is this happy discovery made ! We find the gracious Lord who has fed, preserved, and blessed us, is our own glorious Redeemer. Our hearts are converted to him. Our eyes are opened to see him. His perfect Deity becomes manifest in his word. His obedience and death for us are clear and distinct before our view. His precious blood cleanses us. His gracious providence rules us. His Holy Spirit guides us. His everlasting arms are under us. We are no longer strangers to his love. We now know who he is, and what he is. And we look back and love to recount the many blessings which we have received from his hands. This is

the result of simple Gospel teaching under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. We have learned something of the goodness and wisdom of God before, as our divine Creator—something of what is called natural theology. But when the Holy Spirit teaches our hearts of the fullness of Christ, then we find that our divine Creator is also our dying and exalted Redeemer, our Kinsman and our friend. This is most precious, happy information. With what simple faith we can now come to him! With what affectionate love we can now embrace him! All that we can desire or want seems now to be laid up in him. We love to think of him—to speak of him—to hear of him. All that we know of him only makes us the more anxious to know him more perfectly. We welcome the ministry that preaches of him. We love the Bible that proclaims him. He has unsearchable riches of grace, and is all our salvation and all our desire.

“ Forgotten is each worldly theme
When Christians meet together thus ;
We only wish to speak of him
Who lived, and died, and reigns for us.

“ We talk of all he did and said,
And suffered for us here below ;
The path he marked for us to tread,
The love he liveth still to show.

“ Thus, as the moments pass away,
We love, and wonder, and adore ;
And hasten on the glorious day,
When we shall meet to part no more.”

This happy discovery begins at once to open its blessed results to Ruth and Naomi. How changed becomes the scene of their life ! How the memory of the past now mingles its light with the joyful anticipations of the future. The first result is their mutual agreement to abide, as their choice, by the hopes which now seemed opening before them. Ruth recounts the gracious encouragement of Boaz to remain in the field to which the Lord had directed her steps, until the whole harvest had been completed. “He said unto me, thou shalt keep fast by my young men until they have ended all

my harvest." And Naomi responds with her cordial approbation. "It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field." This is their united choice and determination. And this determination Ruth carries out in her persevering conduct. "She kept fast by the maidens of Boaz." She persevered in her gleanings in his field till both the barley and the wheat harvests, which were nearly two months apart, were completed. It is an interesting illustration of youthful fidelity in the Saviour's work. Faithful perseverance in the right path even to the end. Such fidelity makes its distinct and decided choice. The heart can not serve God and mammon. The treasure of the soul must be single, and its pursuit entire. The Saviour's field is perfectly distinct. To be in the world as he was in the world, can never be unintelligible. To walk in his steps, in active duty, and submissive and patient endurance, can never involve mys-

teries of conduct for our interpretation, though, to our evil and corrupt hearts, it may be extremely difficult of attainment. We can never doubt what positive and true religion is in the human character, or what it requires of us ; our questions are never on the side of things which are certainly right ; but on the side of those which are possibly wrong. In such cases, there can be no question that it is right to abstain from that which is not perfectly free from doubt in its indulgence. Happy is it for the young Christian to take a decided, positive standard of conduct ; and in all things to seek and to pursue that which is manifestly good to the use of edifying, and adapted to minister to a growth in grace, and a real likeness to a holy Master. Such will avoid the scenes and instruments of temptation. "It is good that they meet thee not in any other field." Let the Gospel itself minister to your pleasures, and be the source of your happiness. Ask for nothing

which you can not find there. Be contented with the blessings which are there provided, and find in the peaceful and self-approving service of your gracious Saviour a joy which all the stormy raptures of the earth can never give.

In this simple spirit of fidelity persevere to the end of his whole harvest. Boaz began his barley-harvest with presenting to the Lord his first gathered sheaf, as the first fruits of a harvest to come. He ended his wheat harvest, with an offering of two loaves made of fine flour, as an acknowledgment of his work completed, and his toil repaid. Thus in the day of your conversion, render yourself a youthful servant—your best affections, and your most sincere and earnest determinations, as a sheaf of your first-fruits for Christ. Through the whole of a Christian life, however long, persevere still in your simple, single walk with God, and devotion to your chosen Master. And be ready, when your work is all complete, to present your

loaves of fine flour at the close, the record, the fruit, and the evidence, of a whole life devoted with conscious sincerity to the cause of the one Great Master whom you have chosen as your own, and whom you have desired faithfully to follow. Set out with the determination, they shall find me in no other field. As long as I live, will I be given to the Lord. Him only will I serve. Maintain your choice and your stand to the end. And have the blessed privilege of looking back to feel that your whole life has been really given a living sacrifice to him. Jesus will present you in your new birth for him a sheaf before the Father's throne, acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight. He will also present you as his well-sifted and baken loaves, proved and tried, when your earthly work is finished, and your heavenly life begins. Let all these illustrations meet in you. Happy will be the life which they describe, and happy the death to which it leads ; and happier far, the eternity, in the glories of which

it results at last. Never, as the fruit of such a life, will you look back upon the past with regret ; or round upon your companions with bitter criminations ; or forward to the results of life with fear. Memory and hope will unite to fill your cup with joy, and to minister to all your hours of pleasure their combined increase. Every source of reflection becomes a source of happiness. Every object of contemplation an agent or minister of good to you. You may in all things rejoice—in every thing give thanks. You may adopt those affecting lines of Toplady—

“Sweet to look upward to the place
Where Jesus pleads above ;
Sweet to look inward, and attend
The whispers of his love.

“Sweet to look back and see my name
In life’s fair book set down ;
Sweet to look forward, and behold
Eternal joys my own.

“Sweet to reflect how grace divine
My sins on Jesus laid ;
Sweet to remember that his death
My debt of suffering paid.”

XV.

The Place of Rest.

"Then Naomi, her mother-in-law, said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor. Wash thyself, therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor; but make not thyself known unto the man until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be when he lieth down that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do. And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother-in-law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn. And she came softly and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself; and behold a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth, thine handmaid; spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.—RUTH, *ill.* 1-9.

How many are ready to exclaim, "Rest for my soul I long to find!" When we have been harassed and driven by the pressure of outward cares, or burdened and made sad by disappointment and afflictions, or made to see

and feel the heavier burden of inward sin, the thing for which we ask is rest. The youthful and animated eagerly seek for pleasure and excitement. The aged and the weary desire only rest. To be freed from burdens and toils and human sorrows is in itself, in their view, to be happy. And the subject which we have now before us illustrates and answers the inquiry for rest. It shows us the place of rest. It describes the way to rest. It exhibits the rest we need and get. The only place of rest for the sinful soul is at the feet of a resting Saviour. Jesus says with the utmost freedom and assurance, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Naomi says to Ruth, "shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" She desired rest from her wanderings in a home of peace ; rest from her poverty in a sheltered provision for her wants ; rest from her loneliness in the sympathy and tenderness of others, who could encourage and protect her ; rest

from her anxious cares in some merciful and sufficient arrangement for her future welfare. The need of all this in Ruth's solitary and exposed condition, Naomi well understood, and therefore wisely and kindly planned for its attainment.

But we may well immediately carry her question forward to another and higher application. There is a rest which we all should seek, both for ourselves and for each other. It is rest from the condemnation of our guilt, and the just fear of its punishment; rest from the bitter accusations of our own conscience, and pardon and peace to be ministered there; rest from our agitating passions and corrupt desires, in the renewing of our mind and heart for the service and love of God; rest from the rebellion of our perverse wills, in quiet submission to the divine will and commands; rest from all anxieties for our future life, in an assured trust in the merciful and gracious providence of a faithful Creator; rest from all terrors and doubts in

connection with another life to come, in that perfect love of Christ which casteth out fear. We need that peace which God alone can give us, and which his Spirit only can minister to our hearts. While we are unpardoned in our guilt, and unconverted in our hearts, we can have no rest. Not all the provisions of the world could give us the rest we need. You wander in sin and folly, and your souls remain unsatisfied and unblest, having no hope, and without God in the world. How sad and wretched is such a state of mind ! In the midst of outward blessings which you can not enjoy, because your hearts within have no peace with God ; in the possession of advantages and gifts which seem to be vain, from the sadness and loneliness of spirit which still reigns within. This is the state of worldly minds around us. "Who will show us any good ?" they cry on every side, because their real, great wants are perfectly unsatisfied. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

When we see and think of such unhappy

persons, shall we not seek rest for them, and shall we not urge them to seek for rest, that it may be well with them? This is the object for which the Gospel is preached among them, to awaken their minds to seek and obtain the rest in God which it offers. We know that the soul which has no rest in Christ, can have no rest in any other possession. You may for a season blind your eyes to your need, and harden your hearts against the sorrows which the consciousness of that need will bring upon you. But this is a temporary delusion. Its power to deceive will soon pass by. Your days of indulgence and folly will come to their inevitable conclusion. You can then be imposed upon no longer. God will send his convincing Spirit to your conscience, and sin in its condemning power will revive, and all your joys will die. Then you will seek for rest. Your heart will cry out,—

“O, where shall rest be found!

Rest for the weary soul;

’Twere vain the ocean’s depths to sound,

Or pierce to either pole.

“The world can never give
The peace for which we sigh.
It is not all of life to live,
Nor all of death to die.”

Now, we knew all this before, and with the earnest anxiety of real affection for you, and interest in you, we say, “Shall we not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you?” Never can it be well with you until you find that rest which the present world can never give you.

This rest of which we speak is only to be found at the feet of a resting Saviour. I should esteem it very wrong and unnecessary to enter into any attempted apology for Naomi's direction to Ruth. I should be sorry to think any such attempt were necessary. The divine law gave to Ruth the right to her kinsman's protection and guardian care. And Naomi, in perfect confidence in the religious integrity of Boaz, and the virtuous purity of Ruth, laid out the plan by which, in what she esteemed the best and most proper way, she should present her claim to her kinsman's

protection and notice. The primitive and pastoral life to which they were habituated, made that conduct consistent with the propriety of their several characters, which other circumstances of life would not allow. And it would be equally dishonorable to ourselves, and injurious to the history, to take any other than a religious view of the scene which it describes.

Boaz has finished the labor of gathering his harvest. He has winnowed his grain from the chaff. He has celebrated with grateful joy his harvest festival. And, in the simplicity of his rural habits, he reposes himself after the weariness of days of labor, at the end of the heap of corn which he had gathered. He has completed his work, and entered into his rest. How beautifully the story illustrates the triumphant rest of our glorious Kinsman and Redeemer ! He came to earth for his day of toil and travail. On these very fields of Bethlehem he began the work of that acceptable day of the Lord. He journeyed patiently through all its hours

of labor. He endured the reproach and the suffering of his great undertaking. He persevered through all the obligations which it laid upon him. The fields were white for the harvest which he came to gather. The souls of his people were waiting for the completion of their redemption by his death. The evening of his day drew nigh, and he felt straitened to accomplish the work which had been given him to do. He gave himself up in death, a voluntary sacrifice for the sins of our lost race. He died upon the cross as the ransom for his chosen flock. His work was finished, and his Church was redeemed. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame. He arose in triumph. He ascended to his glory. He sat down on his throne, henceforth expecting, till his enemies be made his footstool. He has entered into his rest. He is receiving his reward. He is seeing of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied. As he gathers his people to himself, he winnows his wheat

from the chaff, and fills up his heavenly garner. Jesus is now a resting Saviour. He reigns in the midst of his heavenly glory, and celebrates his harvest-feast in the constant gathering of his redeemed. All his days of sorrow and weariness are over. He surveys with delight the increasing triumphs of his grace. Precious in his sight is the death of his saints. Angelic messengers bring home his sheaves, conduct his ransomed, sanctified people to their eternal glory ; and constantly increase the joy of his heavenly habitation. And in our hopeful, happy faith, we look upward to see our glorious Lord, no longer a man of sorrows, but the King of Saints. He is clothed with our form. He is in our nature, our great Kinsman and Brother. But he has completely purchased for himself a holy Church, which is to be for ever with him, without spot, or blemish, or wrinkle, shining in his own righteousness, and in his everlasting glory. And there, at the feet of a triumphant, resting Saviour, is our place of rest.

Never, never shall we find rest until we find it there. To have our part in glory is to have our part with Christ.

And how clearly the way to find this rest is here displayed ! With perfect confidence in the goodness, wisdom, and fidelity of Boaz, Ruth carries out her mother's direction. She marks the place where he is reposing amidst the gains of his harvest. She places herself in simple, affectionate trust at his feet. She waits to hear the instructions which he will give her. She goes to him freely, and without fear. She hesitates not, doubts not, in obeying the guidance which she has received. And she finds, as the result, the rest she asks. I know not how I could give to a youthful inquirer a better direction than this. Mark where Jesus, your great Kinsman, is to be found. You hear of him in his Word. You listen there to the story of his triumphs and his mercies. You hear of his death for you, and his acceptance in your behalf before the Father's throne. It is with the ear of faith,

you listen, and with the eye of faith you see him ; with the heart of faith you are to go to him. It is with you no outward bodily journey, but the inward action of the heart and mind. Behold him thus a triumphant Saviour for you ; clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, as the accepted sacrifice for your transgressions. Go, uncover his feet, and lay thee down there with perfect freedom. Believe and feel that he has finished your work, and that his rest is your rest. Do not fear that he will reject you. Think not that he will be displeased at the confidence with which you come, as if it were presumption. There is no presumption in reposing your sinful soul at the feet of one who has lived and died wholly for you. Go with unshrinking confidence and trust, and let nothing separate you from his love. Go to him in conscious unworthiness of his mercy ; with a deep sense of your own guiltiness in his sight ; but with an affectionate dependence on his mind toward you. Doubt

not, but earnestly believe that he really loves you ; that he has truly atoned for you ; that he has completely redeemed you ; that he has freely forgiven you, and blotted out your transgressions, and will no more remember your sins. Believe all this, because he tells you it all, over and over again—in every variety of testimony—in his Word. Go, give yourself up in an affectionate dedication to him ; and ask his gracious and unfailing protection and defense as your Kinsman and Redeemer ; and allow no single doubt to rise that he will receive you. This is the work of his Spirit in your own secret heart. It is all within you. It is a transaction between yourself and Jesus. It is for you to do it. Others can only aid by counsel and guidance. The Holy Spirit must lead you alone, in the silent, secret action of your own heart, when the world may be all asleep around you, and no earthly companion may know the experience or purpose of your mind within. Thus go to the feet of Jesus and

lay you down with perfect confidence, and with a fixed determination there to abide for ever. And there is the place of rest. And thus, in the simple trusting of a believing heart, the sinner finds the rest he seeks.

“I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose ;
I know his courts, I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

“Prostrate I’ll lie before his throne,
And there my guilt confess ;
I’ll tell him I’m a wretch undone,
Without his sovereign grace.”

The plea of Ruth to Boaz is a perfect illustration of the plea with which you must come to the great Saviour of your soul. She tells him her name. “I am Ruth.” She acknowledges her lowliness and poverty. She reminds him of his peculiar relation to her. “Thou art a near kinsman.” She pleads with him humbly, but affectionately, for his protection and defence. “Spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid.” It is the language of deep humility, but of entire con-

fidence. "I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he will keep that which I have committed unto him." With just such a plea may you go to the feet of your great Redeemer, and with the same success. Does he ask you, "Who art thou?" Tell him your sinful state and character. Acknowledge before him your poverty and your rebellion; your corrupt and fallen nature, and your thoughtless, wasteful, and disobedient life. Be not afraid to confess your sins before him freely and without reserve. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. He knows how completely lost you are, and he would have you feel it and know it too. Your plea is not your penitence, but your guilt; not your return, but your ruin. "I am Ruth," not an Israelite, but a child of Moab. I have nothing. I have done nothing that is good. I can do nothing. I am utterly oppressed, Lord undertake for me. Thou seest that I put not my trust in any thing that I do.

This is the lowly, self-renouncing plea of conscious poverty. Say not more than you feel. But strive to feel all that you ought to say.

Plead with Jesus his own relation to you. He is a near kinsman, the qualified and appointed goel for your sinful soul. He has the right and the power to redeem you. And he has given you the right to plead with him for the exercise of this power. You may go and claim from him the offered manifestation of his own grace, and the fulfillment of his own promises. You may remind him of his own assumption of your nature, and his dying in the very likeness, and under the sorrows, of your sinful flesh, that he might redeem and purchase you as a living sacrifice for himself. What a beautiful illustration of such a plea our Litany gives us ! We plead with him there to deliver us by the power and worth of his own incarnation, his agony and bloody sweat, his precious death, his glorious resurrection. We remind him of these as the evidences of his kinsman-

relation to us, of his experience of our need ; and we beg him to apply their worth and influence for our deliverance. You may plead with him his mighty power. He is God over all, able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto him. His perfect righteousness has been accepted for you. His triumphant power is held for you. He is mighty to save. None who come unto him can be cast out. He has given you this right to come, and no one will be permitted to take it from you. You may plead with him his true and unchangeable Word, his precious promises, upon the certainty of which he has caused you to hope, and in the security of which you place your trust. Can he refuse to hear, or to fulfill the word that he has spoken ?

“ Lord, if my soul was then beloved,
O love me always to the end ;
Let not thy favor be removed,
Remain my everlasting friend.

“ I know the Saviour died for me,
For me, that Holy Lamb was slain ;
In him I claim my part with thee,
His precious death can not be vain.”

Thus, with complete self-renunciation, but with entire faith in your Kinsman's sympathy and power, and with a sure confidence in the success of your plea, and the accomplishment of his Word, you may come to Jesus, and build your lowly tabernacle at his feet, resolved to live and to die with him. Like Ruth, your petition is, "Spread thy skirt over thy handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman." Cover me with thy perfect righteousness, that I may be justified in thee. Overshadow me with thy divine protection, that I may be guarded by thee. Acknowledge me as thine, that I may rejoice in my everlasting union with thee. Be thou for me in judgment, to plead my cause, and answer the accusations against me ; in advocacy, to intercede in my behalf ; in recompense, to be my everlasting portion and my soul's salvation. My dear young friends, make this your only, constant plea, as you come to a Saviour's feet. Think with grateful love of the value of his work for you, and the

perfect sufficiency of his grace in your behalf. Let nothing interpose to keep you separate from him, or to awaken an unbelieving distrust of his mind toward you. Never stop to ask whether you have a right to go to him. But go in the right which he has himself bestowed upon your sinful race. He calls the lost, and you are lost. He saves the guilty, and you are guilty. He heals the sick, and you are sick. He consoles the wretched, and you are wretched. He receiveth sinners, and you are sinners. Go to him, then, as if he called you by your own names, and say, "Here am I, for thou callest me!" "I am Ruth." I am lost, poor, wretched, sinful. But thou art my near kinsman. Thou hast been made sin for me, that I might be made the righteousness of God in thee. Spread thy skirt over me; and hide me, O my Saviour hide, till the storm of life be past.

This is your place of Rest. And it is rest for ever. How many myriads of the lost have proved it so! What multitudes in glory live

to witness that the Lord Jesus freely receives, fully forgives, and everlastingly saves, all who come to him. None who trust in him can be forsaken. A youthful Christian, in the last hours of her pilgrimage, thus expressed, in lines of singular beauty, the triumphant confidence of her ransomed soul :

“Shed not a tear for me,
O, weep not that I die;
I am where I would be,
In perfect peace I lie.
A Refuge I have found through grace,
And Jesus is my Resting-place.

“The storms of life are o’er,
The conflict soon shall cease,
Doubts interpose no more,
Now I have perfect peace.
This Refuge I have found through grace,
And Jesus is my Resting-place.

“His precious blood was shed
Sin’s deadly wound to heal;
To that full fountain led,
This perfect peace I feel.
Its Refuge I have found through grace,
And Jesus is my Resting-place.

“Naught else have I to plead,
No other claim to show;

In Christ is all I need,
His perfect peace I know.
That Refuge I have found through grace,
And Jesus is my Resting-place.

“No painful doubts annoy;
Jesus is ever nigh;
No fears disturb my joy,
In perfect peace I die.
This Refuge I have found through grace,
And Jesus is my Resting-place,

“Shed not a tear for me,
Weep not that I am gone,
I am where I would be,
Before my Father's throne.
That Refuge I have found through grace,
Jesus is still my Resting-place.

This was the spirit and the choice of Ruth. This may be, ought to be yours. She found her place of rest at her kinsman's feet. Yours is also there. In simple, happy faith she trusted in her Saviour's power. “Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

XVI.

The First-Fruits of Grace.

And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter; for thou hast showed more kindness at the latter end than in the beginning; inasmuch as thou followedst not young men whether poor or rich. And now my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest; for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning. And she lay at his feet until the morning; and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor. Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her, and she went into the city. And when she came to her mother-in-law she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her. And she said, these six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother-in-law. Then said she, Sit still my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall; for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.—RUTH iii 10-18.

ALL the circumstances of this history are so illustrative of the mutual relations between the Christian and his Saviour, that I hardly

know how to pass so lightly over them. Yet our reasonable space does not permit me to be more minute. When we think of the Saviour's feet as our place of rest, the view will not be confined to the first coming of the awakened sinner thither. The Christian loves to go there, and to be there to the end. He would every day follow the example of Ruth, and seek for the divine anointing and washing of the Holy Spirit, that he may go and prove the condescending kindness of his Lord. He would constantly beg of him to spread over him the skirt of his righteousness, and the garment of his salvation; and betroth him unto himself for ever, in faithfulness and loving-kindness, that he may know him to be his Lord. But the particular view which I have taken of this history here has led me to confine my illustrations to the first coming of a new-born soul to the Saviour's feet, and the first gracious acceptance of such a soul in the freeness and fullness of his love. And with this selected and limited view I

must of necessity proceed. The passage before us gives a copious illustration of the first-fruits of grace to the accepted soul. Jesus welcomes, blesses, and abundantly rewards all who thus come unto him.

First we have divine approval. Boaz does not reject or repel the lowly suitor at his feet. The difference in their outward conditions was great. He was the rich master of the field, and she the poor, beggared wanderer, who had been gleaned from his bounty. Yet he neither chides her boldness, nor reproaches her with her sorrow, nor refuses her plea. He listens to her prayer in kindness. He invokes the divine blessing upon her in her need. He is grateful for the confidence in him which she has displayed. He acknowledges the unspotted excellence of her character, and the purity of her reputation and motives. His whole reception of her is encouraging and affectionate, and another illustration of that pure and elevated dignity which can condescend without meanness, and can maintain

its own stand of exalted delicacy without an effort, and while it seems to have forgotten and disregarded it. And how his whole address to her illustrates the Saviour's gracious approval of those who seek him ! When the wearied soul comes to the feet of Jesus, this is ever the welcome of approbation which it receives. The Saviour takes immediate notice of the prayer which rises up before him, and answers it with the kindest encouragement. Mothers pressed their babes upon him for a blessing, and his disciples forbade their apparent presumption. But Jesus said, "Suffer them to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Poor sufferers followed him in the crowd, and cried after him for mercy. Disciples were annoyed at the interruption, and said, "Send them away." But Jesus turned to them with kindness, and heard their prayers, and distributed the blessings which they severally needed. This is his course with all who really seek him. No application is wearisome to

him. And no sincere and humble application can be offensive. He meets you with divine approval. You may bring your burden to his feet, and with entire confidence cast yourself upon his bounty and love. And he will welcome you with a gracious smile. His own Spirit will minister this approval to your heart. You will find him giving a secret peace. Your soul will have comfort and rest. The choice you have made will seem to you a happy choice. The position you have assumed will be found a place of defence and tranquillity. How different become your feelings toward a Saviour, and your views of his character! How confidently you can now trust in him, and feel sure that he loves you and blesses you! You feared to come in your poverty, and with the vileness of your sin. You doubted his readiness to receive you, and whether he would not repel you, and drive you back. You feared he would ask something which you could not give; and would disregard your plea of absolute need

and deep distress. But how your fears misrepresented his gracious mind ! You can now look up to him, and say, "Thou knowest that I love thee ;" and with equal assurance, "I know the love thou hast toward me." This divine approval, ministered to you by the Holy Spirit, renews your strength, fills you with joy, prepares you for duty, enables you to delight in his commands, and sends you forth with a cheerful spirit to do his will. You are freely pardoned ; you are graciously accepted ; your cares and fears have been removed ; the Saviour loves you and has heard your prayer ; and now, you have nothing to do but to go out and obey him, and serve him with a cheerful heart, and with newness and freeness of spirit, all your days. What an entire change of mind does this divine approval work ! It makes our whole course happy and free. The service of our master becomes our delight. "All the work we do below is light for such a Lord." Martha's mind, cumbered with much serving, and care-

ful and troubled about many things, gives place to Mary's free and tranquil mind which delights to sit at a Saviour's feet, and hear his words, and do his will, and look forward, rejoicing, to his glory.

Boaz next illustrates for us the Divine Promises. He meets the full requisition of his suppliant. He assures her that all her rights shall be acknowledged, her claims shall be respected, and the full duties of her goel, her appointed kinsman, shall be performed. He bids her to exercise perfect faith in his word. "As the Lord liveth," he says, "I will do it; lie down until the morning." What full assurance does he encourage her to have in his promise! And with what satisfied reliance does she receive his promise, and repose upon it! Here is another of the first-fruits of grace, and one of inestimable worth. We have the exceeding great and precious promises which the Saviour gives to his chosen people, and the faith with which he enables them to rest upon them. St. Peter says,

“His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him ; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.” These precious promises which the divine power of our great Kinsman so freely gives us, cover all the necessities of our being and all our possible happiness, for time and for eternity. There is not a want which the Christian feels, for which there is not a provision promised in the word of God. And when we come to ask his mercy, and lay ourselves at his feet in humble dedication to him, the Saviour takes all our concerns into his own hands, and himself promises to provide for every need. To strengthen our faith in his word, he confirms it with an oath, that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope which he has set before us. Like Boaz, he says, “I will surely do the part of a kinsman for you.” I will ransom you com-

pletely. I will restore all that you have lost. I will make full satisfaction for your faults. I will adopt you for my own. I will unite you unto myself. I will justify and enrich you with my own righteousness and power. I will renew your nature, and prepare you for an inheritance of glory. I will restore that inheritance to you, and you shall be mine for ever. These are precious promises indeed. You may make a catalogue of human wants, and then you may go through the Scripture and place opposite to each some special promise particularly designed for its relief. And all these are now given to every child of God. They are the present property of the pardoned sinner. He goes on his way, not uncertainly, or in fear, but under the bountiful and supreme guidance and protection, of one who has assumed the whole care of him, and is able to enrich him with everlasting wealth. My dear young friends, you may always consider these promises as your own. They are meant for you.

Whenever you come to any particular trial or crisis of your life, see what is the promise which is laid up for you. Believe it. Expect its fulfillment. Do not doubt that your Blessed Lord will certainly fulfill it to you. "He that believeth, shall not make haste ;" "shall not be confounded ;" "shall not be ashamed." Lie at the feet of your gracious Kinsman until the morning. Through the whole night of this dark and sinful world, repose upon his word with a perfect trust. Be sure that the heavens and the earth must pass away sooner than his gracious word can fail. This living, peaceful faith, he will certainly bestow. He will enable you to be the praise of his glory, by making you to trust in him. This makes a life of rest, and peace, and joyful hope. And as we think of his promises, and meditate upon his word in our night-watches, we feel that these precious promises are indeed an inestimable gift of grace. But they are a free gift, a gift of grace. They do not depend upon our character, but upon the truth

of his word. Our reason for trusting them, and expecting their fulfillment, is not our own excellence or improvement, but the certainty and faithfulness of the Saviour's word. Do not fall into the snare of thinking the promises are not for you. Take them as blanks which the Lord hath given you. Write your own name in them. Fill them up with the supply you need. And then carry them to his own feet, and say, "Lord, this is the word in which thou hast caused me to trust. Let thy word be fulfilled to thy servant. Be it unto me according to thy word." And never shall you find the promise fail, or your faith in the promise to be in vain. With these inestimable treasures of divine approval, and divine promises, you shall go on your way, enriched and full, and rejoicing in the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Another of the first-fruits of grace which we find in this illustration is the bounty of divine gifts. Boaz not only promises for the

future, but he bestows in the present. He will not send Ruth away empty. He fills her vail with as much barley as she could carry to her mother. An abundant supply for the wants of both. He is as generous in the amount of his liberality as he is delicate and free in the manner of its bestowal. Every new exhibition of his mind and feeling increases the admiration which his whole character has produced. Thus the Saviour richly and freely bestows his gifts of grace upon those who love him. What sweet peace he pours into the conscience in the assurance of our forgiveness! What clear light he gives to the understanding of his whole method of salvation and scheme of truth! What solidity he bestows upon the judgment, in its satisfaction with his plans revealed! What joy he awakens in the heart, in the hope and anticipation of his final glory! What firm trust he imparts in the certainty of his Word of promise! What strength he furnishes for actual contest, and boldness

in the day of battle! What contentment and quietness he gives under the visitations of distress! How he makes our whole path a path of increasing light and abounding peace! These are his constant ministrations, his daily gifts to those who truly believe in him. He saves us now. The salvation which he bestows is not a mere future possible blessing. It is an actual present possession and gift. In the enjoyment of it we rejoice, as partakers of a heavenly calling and a heavenly treasure. This makes our religious life a happy life. We find the service of God to be perfect freedom. It becomes our delight to do his will, and his law is written in our hearts.

These divine gifts are by no means equally enjoyed by all who truly believe. I will not say even that they can be. We must remember and acknowledge the absolute sovereign right of God to bestow the gifts of his grace according to his own good pleasure. We have no rights in the case. What he gives

he gives freely. And no one may say to him, "What doest thou?" But this we may say, and must say, that all our religious enjoyments will be in proportion to the reality and simplicity of our faith. The Saviour still habitually says, "According to your faith be it unto you." If we wait upon him we renew our strength. In him we are never straitened. The more diligently and truly we wait upon him, the more abundantly will our strength be renewed. He will freely say to us, like Boaz to Ruth, "Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it." Whatever we are ready to receive he is waiting to bestow. The vail of Ruth is our own simple filial faith in the promises and power of God. With such a faith, we go from our communion with him, laden with his bounties.

But the illustration from the vail of Ruth fails, in the important fact, that its measure was fixed, but our capacity to hold increases with our receipts of the divine bounty. And who shall tell where God's

gracious willingness to bestow shall find its limit. As faith enlarges, and we learn to expect large things, and to attempt large things, so also becomes enlarged the measure of grace which faith receives. Every divine gift is thus increasing in our possession as we are faithful in their use. The Saviour gives remarkable promises to our faith. It can remove mountains of difficulty. All things are possible to him that believeth. And, however we may limit such expressions in our interpretation, we can not refuse to recognize the great principle of the divine promise, that a rich abundance of grace is always ready to be bestowed upon the exercise of our simple faith in God our Saviour. We may grow in grace even to the end. We may enter into the city of our final glory at last with triumph, "having all things ours," because we are Christ's. We may go home to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads; and be gathered in our full age, whether we be

young or old, "like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season."

O try to have it so. Be covetous of divine gifts in this more excellent way. Stretch out the vail of your faith and your desires yet more and more, that you may receive from the Saviour's fullness grace upon grace, and come behind in no gift. Happy will be your offerings of praise at last for all these bounties. With what delight Ruth recounted to her mother the rich bounty of Boaz! And with what mutual pleasure they dwelt together upon his increasing kindness to them! Thus will your happy soul be employed. "Eternity too short to utter all his praise." And in the ages to come, with the multitude of his redeemed, will you adore his goodness, which had compassion on you when you were dead in your sins, which enriched you with every blessing of his kingdom, and has crowned you at the last in everlasting glory.

The history before us illustrates the divine fidelity. With what confidence Naomi trusts

in the truth and faithfulness of Boaz !
“Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall ; for the man will not be in rest until he have finished the thing this day.” The result proved that her confidence was not misplaced. He did complete with entire success the work of protection and mercy which he had undertaken. It is upon such entire fidelity in our gracious Kinsman that we are required to place our trust. “Great is his faithfulness.” “His name is called Faithful and True.” St. Paul tells the Philippians that this was the very thing in which he had perfect confidence—that he which had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. He tells us even further, that it is *meet*, or just and right to think so. We ought to have this confidence in the faithfulness of a divine Saviour. He is eminently worthy of it. It is upon this that he commands and causes us to trust. He has undertaken to bring his people to eternal

glory; to lead the sons of God to their everlasting home in the presence of their Father. Whom he calls, he justifies; and whom he justifies, he glorifies. "He will not be in rest until he have finished this thing." Jesus is as desirous of our salvation as we can ever be. Do I say *as* desirous? He is far more anxious for it than we can conceive. How he bears with us, and contends with us, and pities us in our individual character, after all that he has done and suffered for us in his own flesh on the earth! Through what trials and sorrows he goes, enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself, in bringing home his children unto eternal life! When you read the seventeenth chapter of St. John, you see the deep concern of his own spirit for the salvation of his flock. He prays that they may be kept; that none of them may be lost; that they may all be permitted to see his glory. Thus he ever liveth to make intercession for them. He promises them that they shall never perish,

and no one shall pluck them out of his hand. This faithfulness of Jesus refers to his whole ransomed family, and personally to every individual in it. It is the great source of our comfort and of our hope. He who has laid the foundation will also bring forth the top-stone, with shoutings of Grace, Grace unto it.

In this fidelity of Christ we are ever to confide. Our simple faith is to be still, and know that he is God. Like the Israelites at the Red Sea, we have the two commands given to us, "Stand still, and see the salvation of God," and "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." It is a faith which supports us in duty, but does not minister to our indolence. It keeps us still from complainings and fears. But it does not keep us still from effort and obedience. It leads us to look forward with hope, and, however weak or opposed we may be, to have no doubt that he who has undertaken our salvation will assuredly complete it. He will keep us unto life eternal. While we thus confide in

his faithfulness, we are able to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. It is this faith which gives us strength in the day of battle, and makes us more than conquerors over every enemy. With this faith was Daniel cast into the den of lions, "and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God." With this faith Daniel's companions said to the king of Babylon, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter; our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand." And over their bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their heads singed. This is the divine fidelity. We go forward in every appointed path of duty relying upon it. No opposition deters us. No difficulties discourage us. No darkness alarms us. No disappointments depress us. No delay wearies us. We believe in the faithful Word of our gracious Saviour, and are at rest. We do not

know how he will do this thing. He may have many plans which are concealed from us. He may have many obstacles that we know not. It may require a much longer time, and a much more circuitous way than we at first suppose. But all this we leave entirely to him. Our simple determination is to abide by him, to cling to his promise, to do his will, to hope unto the end, not to be weary in well-doing, and to leave the whole planning and direction of the work which he has undertaken, entirely to himself. We will sit still in our appointed sphere of duty, until we know how the matter will fall. We have no cares or wishes about that. To do is ours, to direct is his. "The work to be performed is ours, the strength is all his own." Such a mind as this is perfect peace. It is all joy and peace in believing. It is without carefulness. It is careful for nothing. It is kept in the peace of God, which passeth understanding. Try to gain and exercise this constant faith in your great Redeemer. Look up with

confidence in his divine fidelity. Banish your doubts of his kindness and love toward you. And while you are diligent and fervent in spirit in his service, learn to leave all your cares and all your wants in his gracious hands, sure that he will never rest until he has finished the great and glorious work he has begun for you.

XVII.

Redemption Proposed.

Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such-a-one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: and I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it besides thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I can not redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I can not redeem it. Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was a testimony in Israel. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.—RUTH, iv. 1-8.

THIS is an episode in the history. The personal account of Ruth is left for a moment, to bring up the history of this great affair of her life, to the point where she was

to appear in it again. Our improvement of it will take us away, for a little while, from the immediate track which we have thus far followed, to consider in itself that redemption, the fruits of which we ourselves enjoy. I may call the present subject Redemption Proposed. It is a simple history of such a proposition, whether made by Boaz, as goel for Ruth, or made by the Lord Jesus Christ, as goel for us. The Law appointed the type of the goel. The history of Ruth gives an instance of a single observance of this appointment in Israel. Both united lead us to that which both were intended to illustrate and teach, the actual, eternal redemption of a peculiar people from among the lost race of Adam, by the incarnation, and death, and subsequent triumphs, of the only begotten Son of God, in their own nature and for them.

I may describe Redemption to you, under the terms which teachers in Theology use, as Proper or Improper. Proper Redemption is the legal purchase of the captive to be re-

deemed, by the payment of the stipulated price. It gives the redeemer the full right to the captive whom he has thus purchased. But the captive, though thus redeemed, may be unlawfully held in bondage still. Improper redemption, or a redemption which ought not to have been required, is the rescue of the captive by force from unlawful bondage by the redeemer who has already purchased him. In both of these views does the Son of God become our Redeemer. He ransomed us not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with his own precious blood, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot. We are bought with a price. But because we are still held in captivity by the enemy, he comes with the mighty power of his Spirit and plucks the prey out of the jaws of the oppressor. He is thus, in both senses, mighty to save—able to save unto the uttermost. He spoils principalities and powers, and lets the oppressed go free.

If we carry our minds back to the time

when our redemption was future, and there see what our Redeemer must be and do, in order to save and rescue us, the history before us will become a beautiful illustration. The Redeemer must be our kinsman. He must partake of our nature. Because the children whom he was to save were partakers of flesh and blood, he must also himself likewise take part of the same, that he might have the right to redeem. The nature that sinned must be the nature to suffer and to triumph. And, therefore, the Redeemer must be made flesh like us. He must be a mighty kinsman—able to bear the load of our guilt, to atone for our transgressions, to complete a perfect and spotless obedience for us ; and to rescue us from the bondage in which we were held, sold under sin, and condemned to death. No other than an Almighty Saviour could meet the wants of our lost race. He must be a rich and perfectly competent kinsman. He must first triumph himself in the contest which he should undertake. And

then, being justified, and crowned, and exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, he could be able to bestow his gifts upon the captive rebels for whom he came. He could give them repentance and forgiveness of sins. He must be a tender and loving kinsman ; one who could be touched with the feeling of the infirmities of his people ; and be afflicted in their afflictions ; and sympathize in all their temptations and dangers. He must be in all things made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful kinsman for them, in things pertaining to God, and make reconciliation for the sins of his people. This was what the Redeemer must be, to become a goel for us. Such a goel became us—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, higher than the heavens—able to raise up for us an everlasting salvation.

When he should appear as our Redeemer, and the first-begotten should be brought into the world to save us, he must ransom our persons from condemnation, and from our bondage

in death, under the curse of the holy law of God. He must make a full atonement, and offer a perfect and sufficient sacrifice for our sins, that he might magnify this holy law, and make it honorable. He must be made under its authority and fulfill its perfect righteousness, that he might redeem us from its sentence and give us a title to its reward. By his righteousness thus offered, he must enable God to be just and yet the justifier of all who believe in him. He must thus buy back our inheritance which had been lost by our sin, through the worth of his own obedience. He must become possessed of that eternal life, which we had lost, and be able to bestow it again upon his impoverished kin, as the free gift of his own grace. He must actually give it back to them, as his own free gift, and reinstate them in an inheritance which should never more be lost. He must apply to each of them, by his own power, for their individual enjoyment and possession, this great and wonderful redemp-

tion which he had accomplished in their nature ; and thus not only give them a title to eternal life in his own obedience, but make them actually, in their obedience to him, partakers of this life, and meet to be partakers of the inheritance of saints, of holy ones, in light ; partakers of a divine nature, and heirs of divine glory.

This is what our goel must be and do. And this is what the Son of God proposed to be and do for us. When sacrifice and burnt-offerings could be of no value, this great Saviour said, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. A body hast thou prepared me." And this proposal of our Kinsman, Boaz illustrated in the portion of the history before us. Boaz went up publicly to the gate, the chief place of concourse, the appointed place for conference, where men spake with each other in the settlement of their controversies and questions of business. And there, in the presence of the elders of the city, he made his proposition to redeem the family of Elime-

lech. His offer of redemption was perfectly legal in all its points, according to the command and will of God. It was a most comprehensive offer. It embraced the whole condition of Ruth and Naomi. He proposed to "buy back all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, and Ruth the Moabitess to be his wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance." But there was another kinsman, in nearer relation to this family than himself, who had the first right to accomplish this redemption, if he were willing and able. And Boaz makes the proposal first to him to whom of right it first belonged. "And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's. And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it besides

thee ; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the kinsman said, I can not redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance : redeem thou my right to thyself ; for I can not redeem it. Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things ; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor : and this was a testimony in Israel." The proposal was made to him in vain. He could not assume the obligation. It would "mar his own inheritance," and he openly refused the offer. And, according to the custom of Israel, he drew off his shoe, and handed it to Boaz, as a token that he wished him to stand in his place, and take upon himself the obligations which he could not fulfill.

How completely this proposal illustrates the proposition of our great Redeemer in our behalf. Thus publicly he agreed, in the presence of the angels of God, to make himself an offering for sin. Thus legally would he fulfill all righteousness for man, and be made under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law from the bondage of its condemnation. Thus perfectly and completely would he buy back all that man had lost, and unite unto himself the nature which had sinned and fallen ; and betroth his redeemed to himself in an everlasting covenant, to raise up the name of the race which was lost and dead in sin, once more upon their inheritance. All this was to be done. And all this the Son of God would do.

But angels were a created nature, far nearer in relation to man. Might not the proposition be made to them ? Would they not redeem the lost ? Ah, willing they might be—we doubt not they were. But able they could never be. The redemption of a soul

they must let alone for ever. Could they stand in the sinner's place? Could they boldly take his shoe, and meet all his responsibilities? Could they ever offer a free and meritorious obedience for others? Was not all that they could do an actual obligation upon them now? Could they suffer and die as an infinitely valuable sacrifice for sin? Could a creature bear an infinite load, or accomplish a work which required almighty power? Could they come forth, and by their own might die, and rise, and reign in man's stead, and for man's salvation? No! Legions of angels were incompetent for a work like this. They must shrink from undertaking it. They would "mar their own inheritance." They would destroy themselves in accomplishing no benefit for others. The being who was to be brought into this world of sin as man's redeemer, was one whom all the angels of God worshipped, and to whom angels, authorities, and powers were made subject. They were ministering spirits, sent

forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. But to none of them had God said at any time, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee ;" or "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter." They must all refuse a work so unexperienced, so incomprehensible to them as the redemption of lost and guilty man. They may desire to look into it, and to understand it. But they could never undertake or accomplish it.

The Son of God remained alone. His own arm must bring salvation. His righteousness must sustain him. He must tread the winepress alone, and travel in the greatness of his own strength to bring forth the people whom he would redeem. Of all created beings there could be none with him to help him in this work, this strange work. Then, when there was no intercessor, and no arm to bring salvation, he said, "Lo, I COME." He was content to do the will of God, and his law was in his heart. Here was to be complete redemp-

tion. He would take the shoe, like Boaz, and acknowledge the obligation, and perform the duties of which it was the token. He would stand in the sinner's place. He would make himself an offering in his stead. He would come down to earth, and receive a body which was prepared for him. He would become a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He would be betrayed into the hands of sinners, and endure their reproach. He would make his soul an offering for their sin, in exceeding sorrow even unto death. He would endure the cross and despise the shame, for the joy that was set before him of redeeming to himself a peculiar people, who should be holy, and arise in his image, and be to his glory. He would go through this mighty undertaking, and come forth conquering and to conquer, having spoiled principalities and powers, and triumphed openly over them on the cross. He would see a seed, the travail of his soul, in whom he should be satisfied. He would have a redeemed family in heaven

named by his name, clothed with the garments of his salvation, covered with the robe of his righteousness, praising the loving-kindness of the Lord for ever, and dwelling in the courts of his glory, in the midst of whom he would set up his throne, and over whom he would reign in an everlasting kingdom. This was the proposal of the Son of God. This was the great covenant of redemption which he made with the Father and the Holy Ghost. It was an everlasting covenant, in all things well ordered and sure, and was confirmed and established in the counsels of God never to be broken.

My dear young friends, this was our Redemption Proposed. I think you may easily understand the subject as I have presented it to you, though it is the greatest and the deepest of all subjects. God the Father loved you, and gave his only-begotten Son to die for you, that you should not perish, but have everlasting life. God the Son loved you, and came to take your nature and your burden

upon him, that he might ransom you with his own precious blood, and redeem you for himself for ever. God the Holy Ghost loved you, and became the willing Comforter for you, to lead you to a Saviour, to give you a knowledge of his salvation, and to create your souls anew for his eternal glory. Herein is love. It is all love, the unsearchable riches of the love of God. He is rich in mercy, for this great love wherewith he loved us when we were dead in sins.

All this exercise and work of redeeming love was in the fullness of his own grace, without any connection of yours with it. Yes ; just as the proposal of Boaz was without Ruth's presence or knowledge—made in her absence, while she was with her mother at home, and not to be made known to her until it was completed—so was this great proposal of the Son of God to be your Kinsman, and to fulfill for you all the Kinsman's obligations, made without your counsel and accomplished without your help.

This is the unsearchable riches of grace. We call it sovereign grace. It ruled over every obstacle. It met every difficulty. It submitted to no restraint. We call it free grace. It is extended to sinful man with no conditions. It invites him, and offers its bounties to him without any qualifications whatever. It announces a Redemption all complete, and begs him to receive and to enjoy it. It is the wonderful manifestation of the love of God, who thus proposed and finished every thing in man's redemption by himself. We may think of it, and wonder at it, and try to understand its extent and its full value, its motives and its reasons of choice of man, and of us. But we find at last we have always to say with our blessed Lord himself, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Thus God has chosen to redeem. And thus he has chosen us to be the subjects of his redemption.

And now Jesus comes to your lowly habitation to tell you what he has undertaken

and done for you. He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock ; if any man will open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me." "Open to me, my sister, my love, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night." Here is the great proposal to you. Will you now have this Redeemer to be your Redeemer ; this Christ to be your Christ ; this Saviour and King to be your Saviour and King ? He is come to make you his own for ever. Will you accept his offer—agree to be his bride—and go in with him to the marriage-supper of the Lamb ? He asks no dowry with you. He takes you as you are, with all your sin, and all your ignorance, and all your poverty, and himself enriches you with his own fine gold, and covers you with his white raiment. The thing which he asks of you is your cheerful, grateful acceptance of his rich and free offers ; your delighted and cordial entrance into a union with him to be his own for ever. If

you will hear his voice and come to him, he has life and all things, to be bestowed upon you richly and freely of his own grace. You shall come behind in no gift. You shall be straitened in no supply. He will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from you if you are willing to lead a godly life. This is the fullness of his grace ; his proposal for you ; his proposal to you. Hesitate not a moment ; and do not allow him to plead with you a single time in vain.

XVIII.

Redemption Accomplished.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah and be famous in Beth-lehem: and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.—
RUTH, iv. 9-12.

THIS passage brings to our view the great subject of the Gospel revelation,—Redemption accomplished in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in human flesh, for guilty man. We have considered, in our last chapter, what the Son of God proposed to be and to do for us. This was the divine

plan. The only possible plan ; for such a plan, involving so much humiliation and sorrow to the pure and holy Son of God, surely would not have been adopted could any other scheme have availed for man's salvation. But when no other offering could be sufficient, when there could be salvation in no other, and no other name could be given among men whereby they might be saved, God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believed in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, that with him also he might freely give us all things.

Boaz took his kinsman's shoe as a simple but solemn token of the agreement which he had now assumed. He called all the inhabitants and elders of his city to witness that he acknowledged all this responsibility, and was pledged to accomplish the redemption which was thus described and undertaken. The actual accomplishment of the work now de-

pended upon the ability and the faithfulness of Boaz. Could he, and would he do, that which he had thus publicly undertaken? Every hope involved in the promised transaction depended on this. He had pledged himself to meet all the responsibilities and obligations of the case. Every thing now rested upon his power and his truth.

Was it not just so, with the hope of man, from the day of his fall, to the day of the Saviour's manifestation and victory? He had undertaken to be man's Redeemer. "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," was the first revelation to man of this fixed and acknowledged purpose. This was the first pledge of human hope—the first annunciation that the Son of God had taken the shoe of man, and would stand in his place and meet the dangers and the wants of his lost condition. It was a transaction already completed in heaven. The covenant had already been entered into, and established there. Angels who could not re-

deem, had been the witnesses that the only-begotten Son had undertaken to do it. The eternal purpose of God, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, was made known unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places. And he created all things by Jesus Christ, that he might make known in the Church which he should gather among men, the manifold wisdom of God. Redemption was now not only proposed—it was pledged and promised. And the pledge and promise were revealed to man for whom it was to be accomplished.

But four thousand years rolled by before this pledge and promise were fulfilled. The whole of the inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament are occupied with the description of this promised redemption. It makes the subject of prophecies, and types, and histories, through all these intervening ages. From the first promise to Adam and Eve, which told the whole fact, in a few comprehensive words, every generation of believers rested upon the cer-

tainty of this hope, and were encouraged with new and additional descriptions of the particular facts, which were to make up the parts and circumstances of this great redemption. You may read through these sacred Scriptures, and trace the increasing minuteness of their predictions of the Saviour's work. He was to be the Son of Adam, of Abraham, of Jacob, of Judah, of David. He was to appear on the earth, to be born in Bethlehem, to be a resident of Nazareth, to be homeless and a wanderer, to be crucified on Mount Moriah. He was to be a man, the Son of a virgin, without an earthly father—a sufferer and poor, persecuted and rejected, despised by the race and nation whose name and nature he assumed, and cast out with condemned transgressors to die as a degraded and accursed man. He was to be unnoticed, without commanding appearance—meek, gentle, and lowly in his spirit, unresisting to evil, and unavenging of crimes committed against himself. He was to appear when Palestine should be a province of

the heathen, and Judah should be serving under foreign bondage ; to be accused and delivered to death by Jews, and yet to suffer a death which none but Gentiles inflicted. He was to be betrayed by the very persons who professed to follow him, and sold for the price of a slave, by a man who should break bread with him at his table, on the very night of his betrayal. He was to come with no manifestation of outward glory, riding once upon an ass's colt, his highest human triumph, and yet performing the most wonderful miracles ; speaking in resistless words of authority to men and devils and the dumb works of creation, rising from the dead in a new life, raising others also from the grave, and gathering a people in the midst of the utmost contempt and persecution, who should appear like the waving glory of Lebanon in contrast with a handful of barley growing upon the mountains. Though he should be cast out in death with the wicked, the rich would furnish him a sepulcher, angels would adorn and honor his

resurrection, the whole world should be blessed in him, and all the nations of the earth should call him blessed. He should be a despised and undesired man, and yet he was God over all, whose throne is for ever and ever. Men should themselves put him to death, and yet his death should open a fountain of mercy and salvation, in which the very men who killed him might themselves find pardon and life eternal.

These are a few gathered circumstances of this promised redemption which the unrolling language of divine prophecy made known to the sons of men during this intervening period between the Saviour's assumption of the covenant to redeem, and his fulfillment of the pledge which he had thus given. But during all this time, upon what did the hope of man rest, save upon the power and truth of the Son of God? Could he, and would he fulfill the wonderful promises which he had given, and upon which he had caused his people to place

their trust? The history of the New Testament answers this all-important question. These sacred Scriptures reveal the facts of redemption accomplished; the work undertaken completely finished; the fidelity of the Kinsman-redeemer gloriously established; and his Almighty power triumphantly made known. This is now the great message of the Gospel to guilty man. It proclaims this accomplished work, and it begs man to accept and enjoy the blessings which are offered in it freely and without price. Its great doctrine is the one great fact of complete redemption in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath thus raised up a mighty salvation according to his word. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee. Sing O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it; shout ye lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein; for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and

glorified himself in Israel." This is our great doctrine, our glorious message,—complete salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Goel for man, the Kinsman-redeemer of the guilty—perfected by his own merit—and offered freely through his own grace; in which, sins like scarlet and like crimson may be made white like snow and wool—the nakedness of man may be eternally covered—the poverty of man everlastingly enriched—and the ruin and weakness of man gloriously restored. When the Lord Jesus arose from the dead, the redemption of his people was finished. He was declared to be the Son of God with power. A door was opened in heaven for lost and guilty man. God could justify those who were in themselves ungodly, and save those who, in their own condition, were wholly condemned. And then, in his glorious ascension, the Saviour who had thus overcome according to his promise, fulfilled the pledge which he had given, and finished the work which he had undertaken, sat down

on his throne, henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

Like Boaz, Jesus had bought back the whole inheritance for man. All that was lost in the first Adam is restored by the second. The Redeemer himself now owns the inheritance which he has purchased. That which was Elimelech's is now the property of Boaz. That which was man's, and to be in the reward of man's obedience, is now Christ's, and only to be had in the freeness and fullness of his gift. It is his own inheritance, and he bestows it upon his people according to his will ; according to the measure of the gift of Christ. We have every thing in him. Without him we have nothing. He has bought back man also for himself. His chosen flock are his purchased possession, and are to be to the praise of his glory for ever. They are completely redeemed, and shall never perish. There is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. All things are theirs. They walk not according

to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God. They are the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. They have passed from death unto life. And no one can pluck them out of their Father's hand. His gracious message to them all is, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

But the people of Bethlehem were not merely the witnesses of this covenant of Boaz. They were partakers of his joy. They united in their supplications for abundant blessings upon the noble and exalted plan which Boaz had proclaimed. "The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem." Well was their grateful prayer fulfilled; a thousand-fold beyond what they could have imagined. Had they known the divine purposes, might they not have exclaimed with

Elizabeth, "Whence is this, that the mother of our Lord hath come unto us?" Ruth was to be in the appointed line of the mothers of the Lord's Christ. Bethlehem would have rung with triumphs of joy around her redemption and marriage by her exalted goel, if this great fact could have been made known to them.

But angels, the witnesses of the covenant of our Redeemer, were more than silent witnesses also. When the foundation of this wonderful work was laid in the divine covenant, these morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. When the Saviour appeared as a babe in Bethlehem, they filled the heavens with their songs of praise and prayer. "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will to men." When he was traveling in the greatness of his strength, beneath his load of sorrow on the earth, they ministered to him, and strengthened him for his work. When he had finished his conflict in victory, and was

declared a conqueror over all his foes, they rolled the stone from his sepulcher, and attended him in his glorious ascension, shouting in the prophetic language of triumph, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in ; the Lord of Hosts, even the Lord mighty in battle." When sinners hear his message, and return repenting, to seek their life in him, these heavenly witnesses rejoice again before the Father's throne. The Saviour's little ones they love to protect, and are glad to minister to the heirs of his salvation. When redeemed saints are safely brought to see his glory, they carry them home in their arms, surround them in an innumerable company, and delight to join in and to second their songs of praise. When he shall gather in his whole elect they will be the Saviour's glorified ministers in that day of his power. And when the multitude of his redeemed are collected in triumph, and his kingdom is brought out in its glory, these

heavenly messengers will unite in everlasting praise over the complete achievement of his promised work. Then will there be a meaning indeed to "doing worthily in Ephratah, and being famous in Bethlehem." Then will the joy of angels be full—the hope of saints complete—the ruin of man restored—the covenant of the Son of God perfected—and God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost for ever glorified in a proposed Redemption completely accomplished, for sinners who were impoverished and lost under the burden of inextricable guilt.

My young friends, what a view is this of the interest which is felt for you by beings whom you do not and can not see ! How it displays the vast importance and worth of this great salvation which is so freely brought to you ! How it manifests the strong and clear foundation which has been laid for your hope, in the power and work of the Lord Jesus Christ ! Why should you not always rejoice in the happiness of this blessed hope ?

Why should you ever hesitate for a moment in accepting the full salvation which it presents to you? Your redemption is accomplished, perfectly accomplished. The prison doors are open. The captive may go free. Arise quickly, the Master calleth thee. You have nothing else to do but in simple, affectionate faith, in the love, and power, and finished work of your gracious Kinsman, to embrace his promises, rejoice in the consolation which they bring you, and be happy for evermore in his service, and in fellowship with him. O do it now! Delay no longer your complete agreement to be Christ's for ever.

“Hasten, sinner, to be wise,
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Wisdom, if you still despise,
Harder is it to be won.

“Hasten, sinner, to be blest,
Stay not for the morrow's sun;
Lest perdition thee arrest,
Ere the morrow is begun.”

XIX.

Redemption Applied.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women her neighbors gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi, and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.—RUTH, iv. 13-17.

THIS passage brings out the conclusion of the beautiful history we have been contemplating. From Redemption Proposed, Promised, and Accomplished, we have now the completion of the story in Redemption actually applied. From his interview with the other kinsman, and his assumption of the pledge to perform the part of goel for Ruth, Boaz goes to make her acquainted with the

accomplishment of his promise, and to put her in possession of the estate and relations which he had thus obtained for her. His gracious proposal to her results in the elevation of the poor gleaner in his fields, to be the bride of the lord of the harvest, the gleanings of which had before been such a treasure to her. Ruth becomes the wife of Boaz, and the mother of a line of princes distinguished in the exaltation of their day. But what was a far greater honor, she is thus, as the ancestor of David, made also the ancestor of that great Son of David, to whom it is to be given to sit on the throne of his father David, and to reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end. Ruth is herself thus personally exalted and enriched. She has received the blessing from the Lord under whose wings she had come to trust. Her sorrows and her poverty have passed away. The gracious providence of God has been vindicated in his dealings with her. Her personal virtue and obedience are

more than recompensed in the advantages of her new condition. Her affectionate heart is gratified in her ability to protect and comfort her beloved mother in her age. Her generous and grateful spirit is refreshed with abundant means of benevolence to others who may be poor and dependent as she was before. She looks back upon the way through which God has led her with unfeigned praise. Every view of the distant mountains of Moab will awaken new thankfulness for the mercy which brought her from the darkness and misery of that land of idols. Every gleaner in the harvest-fields of Judah will call her soul to new and more humble acknowledgments of thanksgiving to him who was so gracious to her lonely poverty as a widowed Moabitess. Her whole condition shows how truly "light is sown for the righteous, and joyful gladness for the upright in heart." How "blessed are they who have the Lord for their God !"

God graciously gives her a son, over whose birth her friends rejoice with a prophetic

congratulation. He should not only be personally a restorer of the prospects of life to a family that was considered dead, and was forgotten, and the nourisher of the old age of a faithful widow, who supposed her pleasant days had all passed, merged in a cloud of bitterness for her latter end. But his name should also be famous in Israel. And famous it did become. For but a single generation passed beyond him, before his shepherd grandson, the man beloved after God's own heart, ascended the throne of Israel, and established a kingdom not only great in itself, but giving a name and a type for another kingdom to be ruled by the great offspring of David, that shall be of incomparable majesty, and shall never pass away.

Thus the divine ordinance of the Kinsman-Redeemer was completely illustrated in the history of Boaz the rich kinsman of Ruth. And thus the history unites with the legal type, to proclaim to us the fullness, the love, the fidelity, and the triumphant work of the

Lord Jesus Christ, our divine Goel, our great Kinsman-Redeemer, who is, in one person, Perfect God and Perfect man—ransoming us by his death in the flesh, and reigning over us in his everlasting life in glory.

The whole object of the sacred Scripture is the spiritual instruction of the children of God through all ages. The ordinances and histories of the earlier dispensations were types and figures of great truths which are openly and freely declared to us in the later one. “These things happened unto them for ensamples or figures, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Each history, and every ordinance of the Old Testament has its peculiar purpose of illustration of permanent Gospel truth. It is our privilege to study them with this reflected Gospel light. The New Testament gives us principles of study in many selected illustrations which are there brought forth. And we are encouraged to pursue a similar study of all the things which

were spoken in former ages in parables, but which are now thus clearly made known to us, to whom it has been given to know, in the clear intelligence of the Gospel, the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. The word of the Lord abideth for ever.

Thus have I endeavored to carry you through the study of Ruth—following that which seems to me the plainest line of direction in reference to the instruction it is intended to convey ; and making use of no extravagance of imagination for the purpose of bringing out more secret truths. It is a clear and interesting illustration of our great spiritual Redemption ; redemption from sinful wandering, loss, and captive poverty ; redemption which brings us back in a return to God in conscious need, and with sincere acknowledgment of our guilt ; redemption which implies, in our appointed Goel, nearness of relation, tenderness of sympathy, generous willingness in its exercise, and abundant wealth and power to meet the demands which it will

necessarily make ; redemption which will be manifested to its objects in a kind acknowledgment of them, a complete restoration, an affectionate adoption, a faithful union of their interests and hopes with their divine Redeemer, in an established and abiding exaltation ; redemption which will leave no want unsupplied, no danger unguarded, and no enemy finally unsubdued.

This is our Redemption in the glorious Son of God. It comes to us as the unspeakable gift of God, the superabounding riches of his grace. "Blessed be the LORD which hath not left us without a kinsman !" He might have done so, and made us to reap the ways of sin in the harvest of eternal death. He has not done so, but has sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, to do for us that which in the weakness of our flesh, and in the helpless poverty of our ruin, we could never have done for ourselves. Herein is love, the love of God for us. And now he sends us the message of his love, the intelligence of all

that he has done for us, and asks us to receive the gifts, and to become partakers with him of life and everlasting glory.

The Gospel preaches this Redemption to us as complete and finished. It proclaims before us its gracious invitation, "Come, for all things are now ready." The Holy Spirit comes to us, to apply to us, as our own personal possession, the glories which this great Redemption brings, and which this Gospel proclaims. He fulfills his gracious part of this great covenant, in opening our blind eyes, that we may see our own need, and the riches of the Saviour's glory ; in awakening our dull conscience, that we may feel our burden, and acknowledge the just condemnation of our guilt ; in subduing our proud will, that we may consent to receive as a gift of grace that which we can never get as a reward of works ; in recalling our affections in grateful and delighted choice of him for our Friend and Saviour, who has proved himself so worthy of our love ; in establishing our judgment and determination in

perfect satisfaction with him, with our union with him, and with his service for our obedience, whatever it may require ; in strengthening and guiding us, that we may continue faithful to him, that we may persevere in following him, that we may bring forth fruits for his glory ; in purifying and preparing us in an increasing devotion to our gracious Kinsman, for his own presence and everlasting glory. This is Redemption applied. This is an interesting of us personally in that great work of love which the Son of God has finished for all who believe in him. And thus are we made partakers of everlasting blessings infinitely better than all that earth can give, or the human mind has power to conceive.

And now the whole subject comes before you, my dear young friends, in the distinct offer and invitation of this redeeming mercy addressed to yourselves. The Lord Jesus Christ, having finished your redemption by his death, offers to you the full glories which

he has purchased. Just as Boaz came to the lowly habitation of Ruth, to lead her to his own home, as his chosen and willing bride, and to put all that was his in her possession, so does the gracious Saviour come to you. What is your answer to the Saviour's appeal? How are you ready to receive the offer which he makes? How have you already received it? This sets before you the only relation in which you can stand to his redeeming love. You must either accept or refuse the offer which he makes. You must either comply with or reject the invitation which he presents. Your acceptance of him in the fullness of his love is your only free choice—the simple action of your own heart and will. Surely the Holy Spirit leads you and enables you for this choice. But the choice is your own. Just as free in your experience, and just as really under your control, while you make it, as any other choice which you make in life. Will you then choose your portion with the Saviour? Will you cheerfully

and affectionately accept his offered redemption, and go from your abode of lonely poverty, to be with him a partaker of his grace and glory ?

Blessed and happy is such a choice. I may truly say in the language of our history, it will be a restoration of life, and a nourishment of your old age. It will furnish the happiest enjoyments of earth. It will fill your mind with rest, and your soul with peace. It will be a spring to you of constant joy and blessed hope in your present life. It will be the source to you of durable riches and righteousness for a life to come. Let me entreat you not to withhold the heart which the Saviour seeks. Go with him cheerfully, thankfully, at once, to be his for ever, and to serve him alone, with all the powers of your being, and in all the opportunities of duty which he sets before you. Let nothing separate you from his love, or withdraw your confidence in his protection. He will be a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. He will

never leave you, nor forsake you. He will cheer your hours of trial, console your days of darkness, encourage you in your conflicts with sin, refresh you in your weariness under your burdens, and make you more than conquerors in his love.

You will look back over the way in which he has led you with increasing gratitude. And as you call to mind the darkness of your native Moab—the poverty of your soul's condition in unpardoned sin—the gracious way in which Jesus welcomed your first approach to him—the rich rewards which he has given to your faith—the comforts and hopes which he has made to abound toward you—the blessed anticipations and promises which he has spread before you, your soul will every day rejoice the more in your portion, and joy in the Rock of your Salvation. Like Ruth's royal descendant, you will many a time go to bow down before the Lord, and say, "Who am I, O LORD GOD? And what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto? And

this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God ; but thou hast spoken of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God ? And what can David say more unto thee ? For thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant." Happy is every retrospect, and happier every anticipation, in a life sincerely devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ. Happier daily as it draws to the close of its probation. Happiest of all, when in its closing hour you can confidently say, "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; for this is all my salvation and all my desire."

And may I not now say with truth, happy shall we both be, if by this contemplation of Ruth and her Rich Kinsman, any of my youthful readers shall be truly led by the Holy Spirit to say, "Lord, with thee only will we go, for thou hast the words of ETERNAL LIFE?" "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him ; for the mar-

riage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb." Thus will he that soweth and they who reap rejoice together. In our Father's kingdom we shall see the full glories of our glorious Kinsman, and the unspeakable riches of his inheritance in his saints. We shall be taught the new song of his redeemed. We shall rejoice in the everlasting possession of durable riches and righteousness. We shall look back from eternity with constant thanksgiving over the way in which he led us to find our shelter and our portion in his presence. And our eternal song will be, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, and wisdom and strength, and honor and glory, and blessing; for he was slain, and has redeemed us to God by his blood out of every

kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

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